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AN  
A C C O U N T  
O F  
REASON AND FAITH,

WITH AN  
ADDRESS TO THE SOCINIANS;

By JOHN NORRIS, A. M.

(NAT. 1657. OB. 1711.)

RECTOR OF BEMERTON.

THE FOURTEENTH EDITION,

Corrected for a new Grammar and Dictionary of the  
English Language;

By HERBERT CROFT, LL.B.

VICAR OF PRITTLEWELL, ESSEX.

To which is added, by the Editor,

A Dedication to the Lord Chancellor (THURLOW), a Preface,  
and a Letter to Dr. PRIESTLEY.

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First published 1697.

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L O N D O N :

Reprinted for

MDCCXC.





TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE

EDWARD, LORD THURLOW,

BARON THURLOW OF ASHFIELD

IN THE COUNTY OF SUFFOLK,

Lord High Chancellor of Great Britain.

MY LORD,

**I**F your Lordship should ever condescend to cast your eyes on these pages, you will do me honour by accepting the dedication of this valuable little book. At the same time, let me be suffered to call to your Lordship's recollection a man, who is taught, by many of the greatest among his contemporaries, to think himself not ignobly employed

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ployed for his country ; and who must be allowed to boast that, even before he had chosen any such employment, he was honoured with your Lordship's countenance.

It is out of all possibility, my Lord, that I should mean to give the least offence by what I am going to write ; and your Lordship may possibly remember enough of my turn of mind to be certain that I should not write this, if I had not more reasons than most men to respect your Lordship's character and talents. Some, whom I could name in your Lordship's profession, might rise to be Lord High Chancellors of Great Britain, to whom, unpatronized dictionary-maker as I am, I would not condescend to write ; much less, after having been so many years forgotten.

When I explained to your Lordship, some years ago, my proposal\* for a new publication of the laws of my country, which I  
had

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\* A new edition of this proposal is published by Brooke, Bell-yard, Temple. The necessity of such a scheme as I proposed is much clearer now, I presume,  
than

had the honour to dedicate and present to his Majesty, in 1781, with your Lordship's approbation and under your Lordship's patronage; you were pleased to remark that the publick work, to which I then offered to devote myself, exceeded any ideas which your Lordship entertained of Diligence. Diligence and Genius, My Lord, I have always had reason enough to know are things very different: but a great nation cannot have great works performed without the toils of Diligence; more necessary, in certain works, than even the fire of Genius itself.

In all events, I shall not forfeit with your Lordship my pretensions to the humble praise of diligence; and I shall not, I am persuaded, lower myself in your Lordship's mind, if it be such a stern and manly mind as the

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than when mine was approved by the greatest lawyers of 1781. Since then, my scheme has been at times adopted, to a certain degree, by the legislature, whose acts, of late years, have not quite deserved to be considered as standards of the English language.

publick suppose it; by my conduct with regard to one great national propofal, and another great national undertaking.

After waiting, almost three years, in my literary retirement at my ancient and honoured university, for publick encouragement to proceed with my plan respecting the laws of my country (which, without encouragement, I never professed even to begin); I did not gloomily give myself up to fulk, My Lord, and die, like a rat in a hole: I directly betook myself to another work, of which the want is sufficiently understood by those who understand the value of words, and to which the consideration of the old statutes, of Rowley's poems written by Chatterton, of Milton, &c. had in some measure directed me: I turned myself to a history, grammar and dictionary of the English language, which those, who stand high with your Lordship and the publick, know to be more wanted, than if the great Johnson had not given us his laborious and wonderful work.

To



To this I turned myself; My Lord, having, for many years, been in habits of adding to Johnson's book: on this I caused my little, fluttering pursuits in literature finally to settle; because it might be carried on (to a certain degree, at least) without publick encouragement; and because it would go to market (not the case with the statute-plan), and reward me and my family, when finished: for Diligence will have his sons and daughters, and must eat, My Lord, as well as Genius.

Since you have been pleased to assure me, My Lord, more than once, that, however forgotten, I have never done any thing to forfeit your Lordship's former kindness and friendship, I will not suffer myself to entertain a suspicion that I can forfeit them by my present employment; of which I presume to speak here, because I have no reason to suppose that your Lordship has found time to cast your eyes on what I took the liberty to write, in a letter, upon this subject.

What my diligence has done towards my great undertaking, and what I hope still to

perform, I certainly should be happy to have the honour of making appear to your Lordship; for it is, now, near three years, since I made this request in print, to such individuals among my countrymen as cared about "the adorning of their native tongue."\* Bishop Horsley, I am persuaded, would not be unwilling to inform your Lordship what he was pleased to think of the consequence of my work to the language and literature of the country, when my great patron Bishop Lowth condescended to examine my manuscripts, &c. as long ago as the year 1785.

How long it will be, either with or without patronage, before the work which I have undertaken will be made what those, who are best acquainted with such things, wish to see it, I cannot pretend to promise: but I may dare aver that the common objections to great

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\* "I apply'd myself to fix all the industry and art  
"I could unite to the adorning of my native tongue."

Milton's Works. Vol. i. p. 222.

undertakings cannot be applied to mine ; in consequence of the nature of my manuscripts, which I shall not destroy for the press, but deposite in a publick library. The extent of the undertaking is no crime of mine, since it is necessarily occasioned by the extent of our language : and I cannot yet persuade myself that a dictionary of the English language is doomed to be the only one, My Lord, which English liberality and English patriotism will not encourage : and I am confident your Lordship's mind is not cast in so petty and miserable a mould, as to think more highly of a little undertaking, than of a large one, on account of its littleness : and your Lordship has been reading, I believe, lately, of the first great reformer of Architecture, Filippo Brunelleschi, who may be said to have lived to finish his wonderful cupola at Florence, tho' his country, at first, thought him either a fool, or a madman, for the proposal ; though twenty-three years were not quite sufficient for the scheme ; and though he



he did not begin till a time of life, before which I hope to finish.\*

What

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\* See an elegant book, lately published, *Elementa Architecturæ Civilis*, &c. Auctore H. Aldrich, 8vo. 1789, with a translation by the Rev. P. Smyth, and an introduction. Page x,—xiv.

Let me, in a note, say a word or two of this book. Will future times consider it as a book of authority? Rather, will they read it? And, reading it, will they wish to understand it? If so; let any one dip, at a venture, into the English part of this little volume, and see whether he can understand it, by means of the English dictionary. Behold what occurs in as small a space as one page of the introduction, and less than two of the translation.

Introd. p. lxiii. *Professional*, adj. which perhaps is not sufficiently shewn in Johnson; *reticence*, n. s. without any authority in J. *republiſh*, v. a. and *repartition*, n. s. not in J. at all.

The translation, the lower part of p. 26. and the upper part of p. 27. *conſpicuouſly*, adv. *flute*, v. a. without any authority in J. and *cartouche*, n. s. *pulvinate*, v. a. *baſilica*, n. s. *reglet*, n. s. *helice*, n. s. *mutule*, n. s. *ecbine*, n. s. *trochile*, n. s. not in J. at all; or, which is no more to the purpose, the 3 words, out of these 8, which J. has

(var-



What I have already done to my little cupola, by regularly and patiently placing one brick

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(*cartouche, basilica and reglet*), are inserted, as known only to gunnery, anatomy and printing.

This, indeed, is a book on architecture; but was it written by a professional man, or to professional men? It was drawn up by a Dean of Christ-church, and designed for men of fortune, who have as much concern with books like this on architecture, as with technical books on printing, anatomy or gunnery.

My only wish is to have my undertaking tried in this way, by any books; by English books the most classical, and the least technical. Do not open Johnson's dictionary, and exclaim, "What reading! what toil! what talents!" (to all which I will subscribe, after all that I know of his dictionary): this is not the way to try what sort of a dictionary Johnson has given his country, or rather has sold to the booksellers. Take any English book you choose, that which you think most classical, and that which is most your favourite; place under it the present national dictionary of the language in which it is written (as you did, formerly, your Hederick and your Ainsworth, under your books at school), and tell me truly whether the English dictionary can be said sufficiently to explain a single page in what you suppose to be (I care not by whom this

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brick upon another brick, and one stone upon another stone, best proves what diligence I should

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challenge may be taken up) the most valuable and classical book in the English language.

This book, however, by Dean Aldrich, of which I have here been led to speak, the author of a sufficient dictionary of the English language cannot do otherwise than use. We are told at pages xii. and xv. of the introduction, that *cupola* and *piazza* do not mean, as Johnson says, *a dome* (after Addison) and *a walk under a roof supported by pillars* (after Pope): but that *cupola* is the great church, in a city or great town, which in Italy is generally crowned with a *dome*; and that *piazza* is the area which *porticoes* enclose, not the *porticoes* themselves. Johnson explains *portico* by *piazza*; and certainly does not enable us to understand the following passage, in a writer whom most Englishmen consider as classical.

“ Sometimes 5 imprimaturs are seen together dialogue-wise in the *piatz*a of one title page, complementing and ducking each to other with their shav'n reverences, whether the author, who stands by in perplexity at the foot of his epistle, shall to the presse or to the sponge.”

Swift seems to have understood *piazza* better than Johnson — “ There were to be seen stately towers,  
“ noble

should have found for my former proposal, and what I have already bestow'd on my present undertaking.

Johnson's dictionary exhibits about forty-eight thousand words: the number of words which I have collected, that are not in Johnson, amounts to more than eleven thousand. These, My Lord, I have not collected, as some are pleased to suppose or assert, through ignorance or envy, upon the worst authorities, or upon none: I have not collected them from such mouths or such writings as those of

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“ noble porticoes, ample *piazza's* [*piazzas*], and well-turned pillars.”

Political Tracts. By the author of Gulliver's Travels. 8vo. 2 vols. London, C. Davis. 1738. vol. i. p. 333.

This custom of printing the genitive singular, for the nominative or accusative plural (much too common at present), escaped Swift, often, in this volume; which it is possible he might correct himself, as he did not die till 1745. See p. 124. anathema's. p. 109. warrants and mittimus's. p. 88. flower de luce's and crowns. p. 23. quota's. p. 283. innuendo's. p. 171. Junta's. Johnson only gives *Junto*, and quotes Gulliver; but, in this volume, Swift uniformly (and 5 or 6 times) writes *Junta*.

such



such objectors, for I will not think that I was born for such wretched purposes ; and I humbly request these remorseless criticks not to sentence me, before I have committed any fouler crime than my dictionary, to a worse punishment than heaving filth on board the publick hulks ! My Lord, I have collected almost all these eleven thousand words (and there are many more than any one supposes, still to be produced) from the highest authorities in the language of which I am labouring to make a sufficient dictionary : they are used in English books, which future times will long acknowledge to be classical ; or they are used in books, which Johnson owned were so by quoting them, in the Bible, Shakspeare, Bacon, Hooker, Newton, Boyle, Tillotson, Addison, Swift, &c. or they are found in the authorities exhibited by Johnson ; or they occur in Johnson's etymologies, explanations, &c. or, finally, they are used by the author of our first national dictionary, in writings which will not speedily perish, and they ought indisputably to be recorded either as affirmative or as negative exam-



examples to posterity: my dictionary will not exhibit any word, without some opinion of its character at the time I insert it, and I shall also give the character of every book I quote.

But, were the collecting of words, to whatever amount or of whatever consequence, all the pleasure that I promise myself, and all the services that I hope to render to my country and my fellow creatures, Envy would do right to think but little of my labours, and Ignorance itself would justly rise into contempt of a character, which the peevishness of Pope ignorantly termed a "wordcatcher, that lives "on syllables." Almost as soon would I pass my days and nights in hoarding and hiding guineas, which I never meant to turn to the smallest benefit of mankind; as in the counting and heaping up of words, without at all considering their value, and the use that might be made of them. No one shall ever hear me pride myself upon the number of words in my dictionary, but upon the number of passages it can boast, which the good and the

wise among my readers will delight to commit to memory, and which I shall therefore distinguish by an asterisk; passages, "of power" (as one says, who has left many such, both in poetry and prose), "of power, beside the office of a pulpit, to inbreed and cherish in a great people the seeds of virtue and publick civility, to allay the perturbations of the mind, and set the affections in right tune."

My Lord, I do aver, to the teeth of the dullest ridicule and the most domineering genius, that a dictionary is strictly capable of being made by far the most useful, instructing and amusing book throughout the whole compass of the language which it contributes to improve and to preserve. For, let me be allowed to ask, what single page of any book contains that passage of amusement or instruction, which a dictionary of the language cannot arrest for its own; and which may not be held up, as from a hill, to contemporaries and to posterity, at the grandest or even at the humblest words? If this were not so, would such a mighty mind as Milton's have toiled

upon

upon a Latin dictionary? If this were not indeed so; if there were not, most certainly, riches inexhaustible, glittering amidst the very rubbish of language; Addison's taste and patriotism in literature would never have first opened such a toilsome mine in our country: Johnson would not, for any reward, have pursued it, with the approbation of Pope, further than could possibly be expected from his situation: and even I, My Lord, should be of opinion, I had received from God, for other purposes, that patient diligence, which I have, thus a second time, devoted to the good of my fellow-creatures and of my country.

On whatever evil days or evil tongues I may have fallen or may still be destined to fall; I most humbly thank my Maker for blessing me with a turn of mind to be contented, if I may only be found worthy to instruct present and future times, by means of the wisdom of dead and living writers; and “to temper mankind such lectures  
“ and explanations, upon every opportunity, as  
“ may lead and draw them in willing obedi-  
“ ence



“ence, enflamed with the study of learning,  
“and the admiration of vertue; stirred up  
“with high hopes of living to be brave men  
“and worthy patriots, dear to God and fa-  
“mous to all ages.”†

But I must not rob your Lordship of that time, which we all know is spent so properly, by telling your Lordship how I try to spend my own.

Begging your Lordship's pardon for this liberty, I humbly take my leave: with many thanks for your Lordship's kindness and friendship, formerly, before I had tried to do a great deal to deserve them; and with no wish for any further proofs of them, now, than my publick undertaking, and the length of time and portion of my paternal fortune which it has already cost me, shall appear to merit. My Lord, I have no further wish if I at all know myself; for I have never forgotten that grand passage, by repeating which I well remember to have gratified the At-

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† Milton. Vol. ii. p. 847.



## DEDICATION.

torney General Thurlow: and I have been, for some years, endeavouring to deserve (more, I fear, than becomes an honest husband or a careful father) that my little name may appear, as the great Milton says in the passage, to which I just now alluded, \* “ Not among the mercenary crew of false  
“ pretenders to learning, but the free and ingenuous sort of such as evidently were born  
“ to study, and love learning for itself, not  
“ for lucre, or any other end, but the service  
“ of God and truth, and perhaps that lasting  
“ fame and perpetuity of praise which God

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\* This passage I have printed from Milton's own edition of the *Areopagitica*, 4to. 1644. Toland (*Works*, Vol. i. p. 433.), in so short a passage, has added one word, and materially altered another; and Birch himself is not much more accurate. It is my task not only to be accurate myself, but to ascertain the accuracy of others. The names of those whom I find so, especially in this lively age of genius, would not fill a long note.

“ and

“ and good men have consented shall be the  
“ reward of those whose publisht labours  
“ advance the good of mankind.”

I have the honour to be,

My Lord,

Your Lordship's obliged

and obedient servant

HERBERT CROFT.

Oxford, December, 1789.

TO THE RIGHT MONOURABLE

HENRY, LORD OF COLERANE.

MY LORD,

**Y**OUR lordship's learning and knowlege in matters of religion, and sincerity in the belief and profession of its sacred articles, are both so well known, that I cannot be supposed to present this book to your lordship with a design to instruct you in the former, or to settle and confirm you in the latter. There are, indeed, but too many in the world to whom it may be necessary upon those accounts ; but all that I intend in reference to your lordship by it is only to express my reverence and respect for your great worth and goodness, and my grateful acknowledgments for that particular share and interest I have had in your favours.

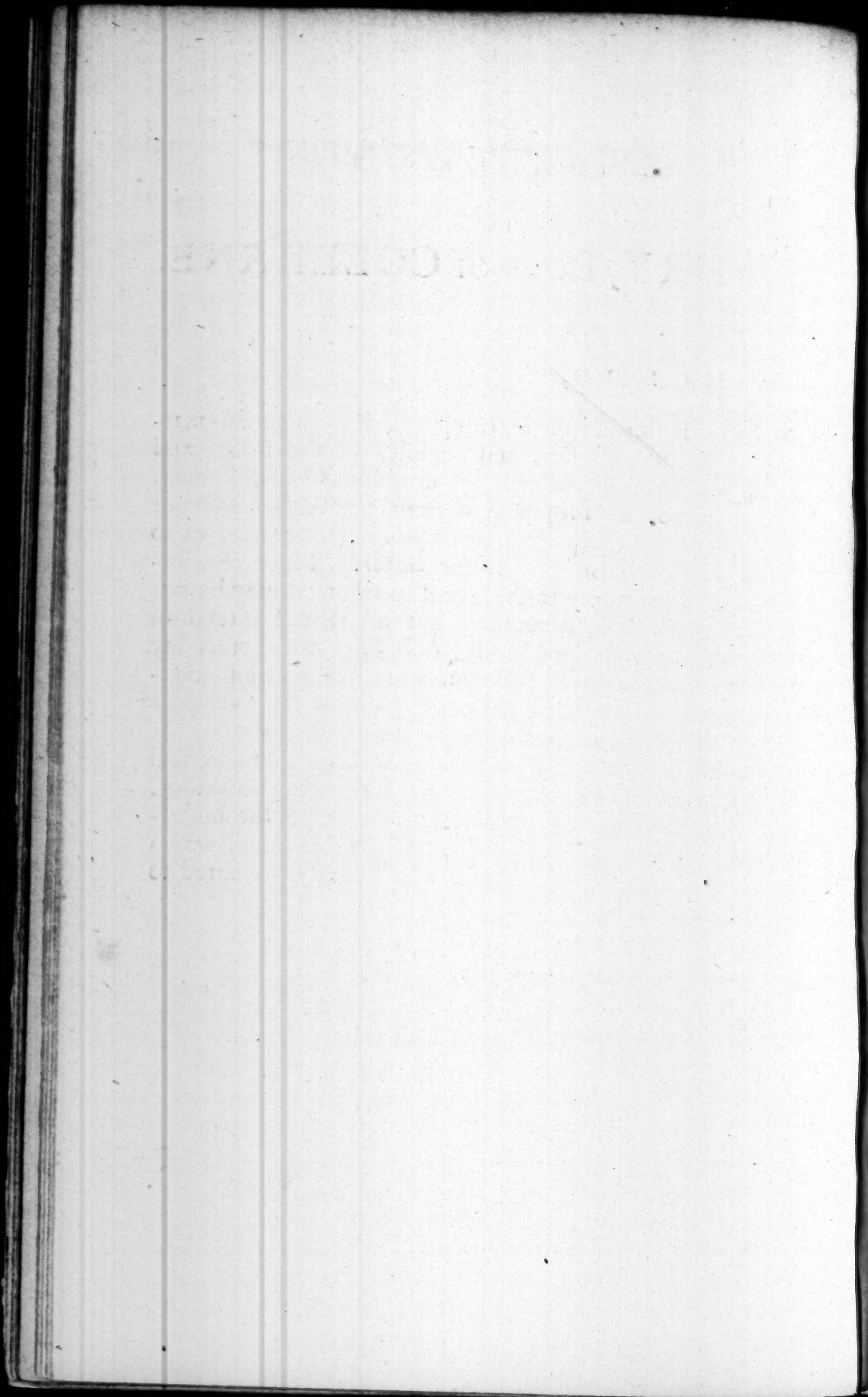
Which give me further occasion to hope that you will be as kind to the book as you have been to the author, and that as you were pleased to encourage the undertaking, so you will now favour the performance, which with all deference and submission is humbly presented to your lordship, by,

My LORD,

Your lordship's most obliged

and very humble servant,

J. NORRIS.





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T H E

P R E F A C E.

CONTROVERSIES of religion, and particularly this, have been managed of late with that intemperance of passion and indecency of language, after such a rude, bear-garden way, so much more like duelling or prizing than disputing, that the more good-natured and better-bred part of the world are grown almost sick of them and prejudiced against them, not being able to see men cut and slash and draw blood from one another after such an inhuman manner only to vent their own spleen, and make diversion for the savage and brutalized rabble, without some troublesome resentments of pity and displacency. And truly it is hard for a man to read some certain things of this character without being disturbed, and growing out of humour upon it, and being even out of conceit with mankind, such an idea do they raise of the malignity of human nature, and so do they ruffle and chagrin the mind of the reader: from which impressions he will hardly recover himself till he *meets* [*meet*] with some book or other of a contrary spirit (whereof the bishop of London-Derry's excellent Discourse of the "Inventions of Men in the Worship of God" is a very eminent instance), which may serve to recompose the one, and give him a better opinion of the other.

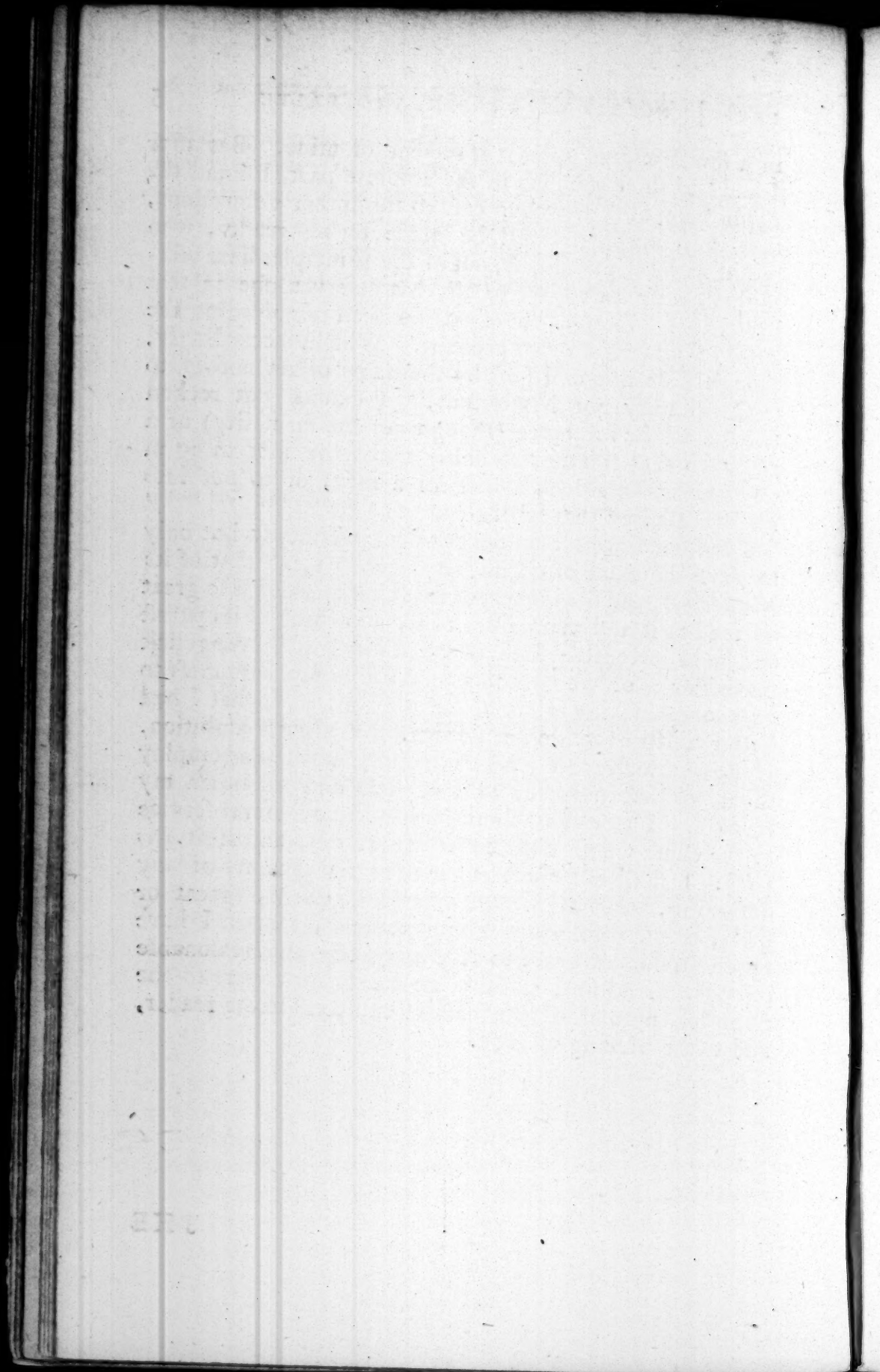
I have endeavoured in the management of the present argument to use such Christian temper and moderation as *becomes* [*become*] the search of truth, and may argue a mind concerned only for the finding [*of*] it. For of all the ill-sorted things in nature, I think it the most improper

and disagreeable, to reason in a passion, especially when it is in defence of that religion which neither needs it nor allows it. And therefore laying aside all anger and disaffection (which even for the advantage of well-reasoning ought to be laid aside), I have set myself to observe the laws of decency as well as those of good discourse, to consider things as they really are in their own natures, to represent them as I find them with all calmness and sedateness, to regard nothing but the pure merits of the cause, and to treat that party of men I write against with that candour and respect as may the better dispose them to lend attention to my arguments, considering it as one of the principal rules of the art of persuasion to gain upon the affections of men in order to the conviction of their judgements. And I do not know that I am guilty of any incivility towards the men I deal with, unless it be that of contradicting them; wherein as they are even with me, so I hope they will not be less so in the other part, but will treat me with the like return of civility and good temper, in case they shall think fit to make any.

The occasion of this undertaking was a certain late book called, "Christianity not Mysteious;" one of the most bold, daring and irreverent pieces of defiance to the mysteries of the Christian religion that even this licentious age has produced, and which has been supposed to have done great battery and execution upon them, and to be indeed a very shrewd and notable performance, even by people of competent sense and learning, not excluding the author himself, who to show his good opinion both of his cause and of his management of it, has since published a second edition of his book with enlargements, and with his name. To which I thought once to have returned a direct and formal answer by way of solution of his objections, till upon further consideration I judged it better to give an absolute account of the positive side of the question; and, after having laid such grounds in it as might be made use of for the confutation of his book, to make a short application of them  
in

in a few strictures upon it at the end of mine. But after I had laid those grounds in the absolute part, I found the application of them was so easy to the author's objections, that they might as well be made by my reader, who might with such readiness, out of the principles here established, form an answer to all that deserves one in that book, that I thought there was no need of enlarging the bulk of mine upon that account. Which, accordingly, though I do not call [*it*] by the name of an answer to "Christianity not Mysterious," I cannot but reckon to have all the substance (though not the formality) of a reply to that treatise, it being much the same thing in effect either to unlock a door for a man, or to put into his hands a key that will.

I write neither for favour nor for preferment, but only to serve the cause of christianity (for so I call that of its Mysteries), and the interest of that church which is so great a friend to it and maintainer of it, according to its purest and most primitive state of apostolical and evangelick perfection; of whose communion it is my happiness to be a member, my glory to be a priest, and, that I had better abilities to do her service, my highest ambition. However, such as they are, I humbly devote and employ them to that purpose, as I do this and all other my labours. I hope what I have written may do some service to the cause whose defence it undertakes, and if it *does* [*do*], I shall not much regard the resentments of any designing, or not so well-affected persons, great or little, whose displeasure it may provoke, though I have taken all due care not to give any body any reasonable offence. And so I commit the following papers to the attentive perusal of the candid and considerate reader, and to the blessing of God.





T H E

## INTRODUCTION.

**A**MONG the various conjectures [*which*] men of a prophetic spirit have fallen into concerning the last events, we have had \* this opinion not long since advanced for one, that, as God formerly by rejecting the Jews made way for the Gentiles, so in the latter days he will in like manner by rejecting the Gentiles make way for the Jews to enter into the Christian church: that the state of christianity being become entirely corrupt, and all over anti-christianized; the first of those phials of the divine wrath that are to exterminate the wicked, and usher in the terrors of the great day, shall fall upon the Christian world; that Christendom shall be utterly dissolved, broken in pieces, and destroyed; and that the Jews shall be replaced and re-established upon its ruins; and, to render it worthy of so fore a calamity, that the generality of its professors shall not only greatly depart from the primitive power of the evangelick spirit, by apostatizing from the purity and perfection of both Christian faith and life (which we have already seen come to pass), but shall even lay down their holy profession, renounce their very faith and religion, and turn infidels: upon the latter part of which opinion those words of our Saviour seem to cast a very suspicious aspect, “When the Son of Man cometh, shall he find faith upon the earth?” (Luke 18. 8.) As upon the former do also those words of St. Paul, “Thou wilt say then, the branches were broken off, that I

\* See Mrs. Bourignon's Works at large, particularly vol. 7. part 2. pag. 193, as also Mr. Poiret's Oeconomic Divine, vol. 5. p. 338.

“ might

“ might be grafted in. Well ; because of unbelief they  
“ were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not  
“ high-minded, but fear. For, if God spared not the  
“ natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee.  
“ Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God : on  
“ them which fell, severity ; but towards thee, goodness,  
“ if thou continue in his goodness. Otherwise thou also  
“ shalt be cut off” (Rom. 11. 19, 20, 21, 22.) : that is,  
as a dead, withered, and unfruitful branch, as were the  
Jews for the same reason before, and as our Saviour  
tells us every unfruitful branch shall be (Job. 15, 2.).

2. And truly if one were to judge of these men’s  
opinion by the present face and state of things, one  
would be inclined to think it true, and that they had  
the right key of prophecy in their hands. For sure by  
all signs and appearances, the course of the world seems  
to drive this way ; and if there be such a fatal revolution  
to come, no doubt but that we are with large steps hast-  
ening to it. For how are the vitals of religion con-  
tinually struck at, the foundations of it unsettled and  
undermined, its venerable articles disputed and ridi-  
culed, and by what a slender thread does Christianity  
hang ! The great complaint for a long while has been  
of the decay of Christian piety, and the universal cor-  
ruption of manners. But now our religion is corrupted  
as well as our manners, and we every day make ship-  
wreck of our faith as well as of a good conscience. So  
that we have now filled our measure, and are every  
way ripe for destruction. Some deny all revealed reli-  
gion, and consequently the Christian ; others, allowing  
the divinity of the religion, deny that of its author,  
together with the doctrines of the Trinity, incarnation,  
and satisfaction ; others again, owning his divinity, deny  
the necessity of believing it ; others again, granting that,  
and the other points, deny the necessity of his satis-  
faction, which is not only resolved into mere prudential  
reasons (as formerly), instead of being grounded upon  
the essential order and justice of God, but is brought  
down so low of late as to be made an accommodation  
and

and condescension to, and a gracious compliance with, the common weaknesses and prejudices of mankind. Thus is the Christian religion so mangled and dismembered by some, and so oddly and insidiously represented by others, that between them both the general faith of the thing is endangered, and a ready way prepared to scepticism and infidelity.

3. Not that I think it ought to be any just matter of scandal to any considering Christians, or prejudice to their holy religion, to see so many corruptions of it, and apostacies and revoltings from it, since this is no more than what the Holy Spirit of God has often forewarned us shall come to pass in the latter days; wherein we are expressly told, that perilous times shall come, and that men shall resist the truth, be proud and high-minded, of corrupt minds, and reprobate concerning the Faith (2 Tim. 3). And moreover, that they shall privily bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them (2 Pet. 2). This therefore I say ought in reason to be no matter of scandal to any Christians. And so neither ought the poor, humble, suffering condition of Jesus Christ to have been any to the Jews, since this also was plainly foretold of the Messiah, and made a notable part of his character. And yet we find that the cross of Christ was a stumbling-block to the Jews, and so no doubt are the present sufferings, I may say crucifixion, of his religion to many Christians; the generality of which measure the certainty of their faith by the firmness and constancy of its professors, and are apt more to stagger and take offence at the untoward appearance of any event, than to be confirmed in their belief from its agreement with ancient prophecies.

4. In the mean time what do those without think of us? Particularly the Heathens, among whom no doubt there are some that neither want intelligence nor curiosity to acquaint themselves with the present state of Christendom. What a confirmation must it be to these men in their infidelity, to see Christians grow weary of their own religion, and willing to part with those great



great and weighty articles of it for which the holy martyrs shed their blood, and which could not be extorted from them by all the might and power of their cruel emperors? Can it be expected that these men should embrace a religion which they see thus continually deserted by its own disciples? Or rather, instead of converting themselves to Christianity, will they not look every day when the Christians shall come over to them? For truly this seems to be the state of the Christian world at this time. We are posting as fast as we can into Heathenism, and stand even upon the brink of infidelity. The great articles of our religion are giving up every day, and, when men have parted with these, we are very much beholden to them if they retain any of the rest, there being nothing in Christianity considerable enough, when the great mysteries of the Trinity, incarnation, &c. are taken away, to make it appear an institution worthy of God, or to challenge the assent of any thinking and considering man. But why do I talk of running into Heathenism? I am afraid we are tending further. For, as from a Socinian it is easy to commence a Deist, so he that is once a Deist is in a hopeful way to be an Atheist whenever he please.

5. I do not speak these things out of a spirit of peevishness and dissatisfaction, as some who, being full of a querulous, splenetick humour, and knowing not how better to dispose of it to their ease, give it vent upon the times, of which they are always complaining right or wrong. No; the deplorable and dangerous state of Christianity, and the too visible growth of Socinianism and Deism among us, extort these reflections from me, and have given me many a troublesome and uneasy thought in my private retirements. For my satisfaction under which, my best salvo has been to consider that God governs the world, and that Jesus Christ, who is the head of his church, will preserve it from all the powers of earth, and even from the gates of hell. And that though now he *seems* [*seem*] to be asleep in this sacred vessel while the tempest rages, and the waves beat



beat against it, and almost cover it, yet it is to be hoped he will awake, and rebuke the winds and the sea, and make all calm and quiet again. However, in the mean time, it is fit the mariners should work, and neglect the use of no means that are necessary to the safety of their ship; some by writing, others by private discourse, and all by prayers and a good life.

6. But now whereas all rational method of cure is founded upon the knowledge of the cause of the <sup>dis</sup>temper, he that would contribute any thing to the stopping [of] this contagion of Religious Scepticism that now reigns among us, ought in the first place to consider the reason of it, what it is that makes men so disposed to waver in their religion, and so ready to part with the great articles and mysteries of it. Now to this purpose I call to mind a very considerable observation of \* Descartes concerning atheism, which I take to be equally applicable to infidelity, particularly to this of the mysteries of the Christian faith: the observation is this; “that those things, which are commonly alledged by “Atheists to impugn the existence of God, do all turn upon this, that either we attribute some human affection “to God, or else arrogate *so* [*sach*] great force and pene- “tration to our own minds, as to go about to compre- “hend and determine what God can and ought to do. “So that if we would but carry about us this thought, “that our minds are to be considered as finite, but God “as incomprehensible and infinite, there would be no “further difficulty in any of their objections.” Thus that very acute and judicious person concerning the grounds of atheism. And in like manner I think it may be said of infidelity, as to the mysteries of Christianity, that the great reason, why so many that call themselves Christians do so obstinately cavil at them and dispute them, is, that either they think too meanly of God, or too highly of themselves; that either they ascribe something human to his nature, or something divine to their own; that either they set too narrow limits

\* In the preface to his Metaphysical Meditations.

to the divine power and greatness, or carry out too far those of their own understandings; in one word, that either they humanize God, or deify themselves and their own rational abilities.

7. And they confess, in effect, as much themselves. For the reason, that these men commonly give out and pretend for their not allowing the mysteries of the Christian religion any room in their creed, is, that they are above the reach of their understandings. They cannot comprehend them, or conceive how they can be, and therefore will not believe them; having fixed it as a law in the general, to believe nothing but what they can comprehend. But, now, where does the ground of this consequence rest at last, or upon what principle does it ultimately depend? How comes the incomprehensibility of a point of faith to be a presumption against it; why is its being above their reason an argument that it is not true? Why, I say, but only because, in the first place, they attribute so much to their reason (at least by a confuse sentiment) as to presume it to be the measure and standard of all truth, and that nothing that is true can really be above it? Here, I say, the stress of the matter will rest at last. For, should the argument of these men be reduced to a syllogistical form, it must necessarily proceed thus:

Whatever is [*be*] above our reason, is not to be believed as true;

But the reputed mysteries of christianity are above our reason:

Therefore the reputed mysteries of christianity are not to be believed as true.

Now, the only contestable proposition in this syllogism is the major, which can be proved by no other principle than this, that our reason is the measure of all truth; and whose proof must be in this form:

Whatever is [*be*] above the measure of all truth, is not to be believed as true;

But our reason is the measure of all truth:

Therefore whatever is [*be*] above our reason, is not to be believed as true.

By

By this analysis of their argument into its principle, it is plain, that this their reason of disbelieving the mysteries of the Christian religion, viz. because they are above their reason, does at last resolve into this, that their reason is the measure of all truth, and that they can comprehend all things. For, otherwise, how should their not being able to comprehend a thing, be an argument that it is not true? This, I presume, is a principle our adversaries would be loth to own; and, indeed, with good reason, it being the most extravagantly absurd and self-arrogating one that can possibly enter the thought, or proceed from the mouth, of a man. And, accordingly, I do not know any Socinian that had the immodesty in terms openly to assert it. But this is what they must come to if they will speak out, and what in the mean time they do virtually and implicitly say. So, then, their procedure in short seems to be this, they first set their reason above all things, and then will believe nothing that is above their reason. And if this be not in an unreasonable measure to exalt that faculty, to carry it beyond its due bounds, nay to set it no bounds at all, but strictly to make it infinite, and so to ascribe to it no less than a divine perfection, I must profess my despair ever to know what is.

8. To be the adequate measure of all truth, so as to have no one truth above the comprehension of it, is as much as can be said of the reason and understanding of God himself. His infinite understanding is indeed truly and necessarily so, and whatever *is* [be] above his reason, is for that very reason most certainly not true. Because, he essentially comprehending all that truly is, it must necessarily follow, that whatever he *does* [do] not comprehend must be nothing. But to say the same of the reason of a man, or of the intelligence of the most illuminated angel, would be to confound all distinction between finite and infinite, God and creature; and to advance the most absurd, and withal the most impious and blasphemous proposition imaginable. And yet this is the general principle upon which the body of Socini-



anism turns, and by which it would be most directly and most compendiously confuted.

9. I shall therefore take hold of it by this handle : and since that which is a principle one way, as we argue forwards from the cause to the effect, may be considered as a consequence another way, as we argue backwards from the effect to the cause ; and since there are these two general ways of reasoning, I shall therefore proceed both these ways in the management of the present argument, which accordingly shall turn chiefly upon this double hinge. First, I shall overturn their principle (I call it theirs, because it is what they must at last necessarily come to), by showing that human reason is not the measure of truth, or that there may be some things which are above the comprehension of human reason, and that therefore a thing's being above reason, is no concluding argument of its not being true. Secondly I shall argue *ab absurdo*, by showing that if a thing's being above reason were an argument of its not being true, then it will follow, that human reason is the measure of all truth, which if I bring them to, I shall think them reduced to a sufficient absurdity. These I intend as the two great pillars of this work, which, like the sides of an arch, will strengthen and bear up one another ; that which is liable to exception in the former part being made out in the latter, and that which is liable to exception in the latter being made out in the former. For, if it be questioned in the first part, whether this be indeed their principle, " that human reason is the " measure of all truth," that will appear in the second, wherein it will be shown to follow from their supposition. And if it be questioned in the second part, whether this their principle be absurd, and so whether they are [*be*] reduced to an absurdity, that will appear in the first, wherein this principle is shown to be false.

10. And when by this method I have shown in general both *a priori* and *a posteriori*, that a thing's being above human reason is of itself no sufficient argument of its not being true, I shall then make application of all



all to the mysteries of the christian religion, which I shall show may be true, notwithstanding their being above human reason, and so that their being above it is no just ground to conclude them false, and that therefore they ought to be believed, notwithstanding their being above our reason, which in this case ought to be no prejudice to our faith, supposing them otherwise sufficiently revealed. Which whether they *are* [*be*] or *no* [*not*] I shall not discuss, my design at present not being to enter into the detail of the controversy, to prove the particular mysteries of the christian faith, such as the Trinity, Incarnation, or the like; but only to lay a general ground and foundation for the belief of those articles, and to destroy that upon which the body of Socinianism stands. The great and general principle of which I take to be, that nothing is to be believed as revealed by God that is above the comprehension of human reason; or, that a man is to believe nothing but what he can comprehend. Which principle I hope, by the help of God, with the utmost evidence and demonstration to overthrow. And because, in order to this, I must first give a direct and professed account of Reason and Faith, besides what will be said incidentally and occasionally of them in the course of the treatise, whose main design is so to adjust and accommodate the natures and properties of these two things together, as to show the reasonableness of believing the mysteries of the christian religion; thereupon it is that I entitle the whole, “an Account of Reason and Faith, in relation to the Mysteries of Christianity.” This is the gross of what I design, the particulars of which will be more distinctly laid down and accounted for in the following chapters.

## C H A P. I.

*Of Reason.*

1. **A**MBIGUITY of words being one great occasion of confusion of thoughts; whoever will discourse clearly and distinctly of any subject, must, in the first place, fix and settle the signification of his terms, in case they *are* [*be*] ambiguous; that is, if one and the same term be applied to different ideas. In this case, definition of the name is to go before the definition of the thing; between which two I conceive the difference to be this, that in a nominal definition the word is only determined to such a certain idea, whereas in a real one, the idea itself is opened and explained by some other ideas, that are supposed to be contained and involved in it. Upon which account it is that nominal definitions are arbitrary, and therefore incontestable, and therefore may be used as principles in discourse, as they are in geometry; whereas real definitions are not arbitrary, but must be conformed to the nature of things, and so are not to be taken for principles, whose truth is to be supposed, but for disputable propositions, whose truth is to be proved.

2. Reason therefore being an ambiguous word, and of various acceptation, before I proceed to give an account of the nature of the thing, it will be necessary that I define the name; which will also be the better defined, if it be first distinguished. Now all distinction being a sort of division, in which, according to the rules of logick, the distribution ought to be into the most general, and most immediate members, I shall accordingly distinguish of the several meanings of this word Reason, by the same measure as I would divide any whole into its parts.

3. I consider therefore, that the most general distribution of Reason is into that of the object and that of the subject; or, to word it more intelligibly, though perhaps

perhaps not altogether so scholastically, into that of the thing, and that of the understanding. Reason objective, or of the thing, is again very various: sometimes it is taken for truth, and that both for truth of the thing, namely the essential relations that are between ideas; and for truth of the proposition, which is its conformity to those ideal relations. Thus it is taken the first way for the ideal relations themselves, when we enquire whether the reasons of good and evil *are* [*be*] *ab eterno*, meaning by reasons the essential relations or differences. Thus again it is taken the second way, for the agreement or conformity of a proposition with those essential relations; as when we say, "this is Sense and Reason;" meaning that the proposition is true, and conformable to the nature of things. Sometimes again it is taken for the medium, argument, or principle whereby a truth is proved; as when we say, "do you prove this by Reason or by Authority?" Sometimes again for the rules and measures of reasoning; as suppose I should say, "that reason is the fittest study for a rational creature," I should be supposed to mean those rules and measures whereby we ought to reason, and so to intend a commendation of logick. Sometimes again it is taken for moderation; as when we say, "there is Reason in all things." Sometimes for right, equity, or justice; the observation of which is commonly called, "doing a man Reason." It is also taken for the end or motive of an action; as when we say, "for what Reason do you this or that?" in which sense it is used by the Poet;

—— *stat pro Ratione voluntas.*

4. Come we now to the consideration of reason, as it is taken "subjectively," the other general part of its distinction, in which also there is some variety of acceptance. For it is sometimes taken for the act, sometimes for the habit, and sometimes for the natural power or faculty of reasoning. For the act; as when we say of a man asleep, that "he is deprived of his reason." For



the habit; as when we say of a man, that "he has lost his reason," when his intellects are mightily disordered and impaired by a disease. For the natural power or faculty of reasoning; as when we say, "that man is a creature indued with reason." Which being a proposition of universal truth, and that proceeds of man as man, must necessarily be verified of every man, and consequently must not be meant of the act or habit of reason (for these are not at all times in every man), but of the natural power or faculty of it, which is not liable to be suspended as the act, nor lost as the habit, but is essential to the nature of man, that which constitutes him what he is, and distinguishes him from other creatures; and consequently is inseparable from him, whether asleep or awake, whether sick or well.

5. Reason thus considered as it stands for a power or faculty in human nature, may be taken again either largely or strictly. Largely, for the power of thinking or perception in general, whereby a man is capable of knowing or understanding any truth, let it be by what means, or in what order or method soever. Strictly, for the same power proceeding after a certain special manner, and according to a peculiar order and method, namely, from the knowledge of one thing to that of another, or to the knowledge of what is, as yet, obscure and unknown, by the knowledge of what is more clear and better known; concerning which a fuller account by and by.

6. After having thus distinguished; with what exactness of order I could, the several acceptations of the word Reason, I shall in the next place define in which of these senses I now use it. By reason then in this place, I intend not reason of the object, but that of the subject; and that not as to the act or habit, but as to the natural power or faculty of reasoning. And that again not as it is taken strictly, as it uses a certain particular process in its operation, but as it is taken more at large for the power of perceiving or knowing in general. According to which sense reason is here the same with understanding.

ing. And so it is often used; as when we say, "the reason of a man teaches him this or that;" meaning his understanding at large, or the general power whereby he understands. For if science, which, strictly taken, is that particular kind of knowledge which is acquired by demonstration, be yet often used more largely for knowledge in general, why may not reason, the great principle and faculty of science, which, strictly taken, signifies a power of knowing by such a certain way and in such a certain manner of proceeding, be taken as well in a greater latitude, for the power of knowing or understanding in general?

7. And the nature of the subject and question now under consideration requires that it should be thus used here. For when it is enquired whether there be any thing in religion above reason, the meaning certainly can be no other than whether there be any thing which surpasses the power and capacity of a man's understanding to comprehend or account for? And he that says there is nothing in religion above reason, is supposed to mean, that there is nothing in it beyond the comprehension of a man's natural understanding, nothing but what he can profound and fathom. And so also he that says, that there are mysteries in christianity, or things above our reason, must be presumed to mean, that there are revealed truths that so far exceed the measure of our intellectual faculties, and are of a size so disproportionate to our minds, that, with all the force and penetration of spirit, and the utmost application of thought, we cannot possibly comprehend them, be our method of proceeding what it will. I do not intend by this to state the question (which shall be done more fully in its due place), but only to give an account of one of its terms, and to show that by Reason I both do and should here mean, a man's natural power of knowing or understanding in general. In which use of the word, it is no small authority to me that the excellent and most accurate author of *L'Art de Penfer*, defines logic to be an art of well conducting one's reason in the knowledge  
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of things : where, by reason, it is plain he must mean the same as understanding.

8. What this power or principle of understanding is in itself, or in its own nature and essence, I do not pretend to know, as not having any clear idea of my own soul, and indeed as not knowing myself at all by idea, but only by a confuse sentiment of internal consciousness. And therefore I shall not go about to examine what it is. For the same reason also I shall not set myself to consider whether the understanding be any power or faculty really distinct from the soul, or only the soul itself acting after a certain manner, this being almost as obscure as the other ; and I care not to employ either my own thoughts, or my reader's, upon things whereof I have not any clear conception. All that I shall therefore further treat of concerning the understanding (for so I now call our reason) shall be with respect to its operations, by which the nature of it is best known, and whereof we are not only conscious by way of sentiment, but have also, or at least by self-reflection may have, some notion and conception by way of idea.

9. Now these are ordinarily supposed to be three, apprehension, judgement, and discourse ; by apprehension, meaning the simple view or perception of a thing ; by judgement, the joining or separating of ideas by affirmation or negation ; by discourse, the collecting of one thing from another. And upon this threefold ground our systems of logick have for a great while proceeded with great agreement. But as authentic as time and consent have made this division, I cannot think it right, when I compare it with what by self-reflection I find to pass within my own mind. For supposing it were true as to the matter of it ; that is, I mean, that judgement and discourse did really belong to the understanding (which yet the philosophers of the Cartesian way will by no means allow), yet the form of it must needs be very unartificial and inaccurate. For truth being the general object of the understanding, and there



there being nothing in truth but ideas and the relation that is between them, it is impossible there should be any more operations of the understanding than perception and judgement; perception as to the ideas themselves, and judgement as to their relation. Which judgement it is true may be either immediate or mediate; immediate when the relations of ideas are judged of by the very ideas themselves, or mediate when they are judged of by the help and means of some other idea; but then all this is but judgement still, though in two different ways, the difference between them being the same as between judging of a thing under the formality of a proposition, and judging of the same thing under the formality of a conclusion. These indeed are different ways of judging, but still they are both but judgements, and one as much as the other. So that in reality that which these men call discourse is but a species of judgement; and if for that reason they will consider it as distinct from judgement, and make it a third operation, they might as well have put in the other species too (judgement immediate), and so made a fourth. But then this is against the great fundamental law of division, which requires that one of the members ought not to be so included in the other, as that the other may be affirmed of it. Which is plainly the case here, this being such a kind of division, as if one should divide a living creature into a plant, an animal, and a man, and that because discourse is as much a species of judgement as man is of animal. And herein (though the matter be so clear that I need it not), yet I happen to have the authority of a considerable philosopher on my side, Monsieur Derodon, who in these few words expresses his sense full and home to this purpose; \* "the third operation of the mind," says he, "is commonly called discourse, but is properly the judgement of the consequent, as inferred from the judgement of the antecedent."

\* Philoso. Contract. p. 242.

10. By this it is evident, that supposing the matter of this division *never* [*ever*] so true, that is, that judgement and discourse do appertain to the understanding, yet the form of it is wrong; discourse, which is here made a third member of the division, being contained under judgement, which is the second, as the species of it. But neither is the matter of it true. For judgement and discourse, or to speak more accurately, judgement, whether immediate or mediate, does indeed not belong to the understanding, but (as will by and by appear) to the will. There is but one general operation that belongs to the understanding, and that is perception. For, as I said before, truth being the general object of the understanding, and there being nothing in truth but ideas and their relations, all that the understanding can here have to do will be only to perceive these ideas, and the several relations that are between them. For, when this is done, then is a thing sufficiently understood; to understand a thing being no more than to perceive its ideas, and how they stand related to one another. Here is the whole compass and full extent of the understanding, and all that we can possibly conceive by it; and he that perceives ideas and their relations, understands as much of them as is to be understood. Whereby it is evident, that perception is the only operation of the understanding, and that it can have no other. It is true indeed there is variety in this perception, it being either simple or complex; simple of the ideas themselves, and complex of their relations; which latter again is either immediate or mediate (as was said before of judgement), but still it is all but perception, though differently modified; which therefore I conclude to be the only operation that properly belongs to the understanding.

11. But now if all that of right belongs to the understanding be perception, then it is most certain that judgement cannot belong to the understanding, and that because judgement is not perception. For we are said to judge as we perceive, and some are so much in haste that they will judge before they perceive, which plainly shows

shows them to be two different things. And that they are so this one argument, well considered, is a demonstration, that judgement is a fallible thing, that may be true or false as it happens; whereas perception is always true, it being a contradiction that it should be otherwise: for what a man does not truly perceive, he does not perceive at all. I conclude, therefore, that judgement is not perception; and since perception is (as has been shown) the only operation of the understanding, I conclude again that judgement does not belong to the understanding. It must, therefore, belong to the will, which is the proper seat both of judgement and of error *too* [*d*]. And it is nothing else but the will's consenting to and acquiescing in the representations that are made by the understanding. Which agrees well with those weighty and very fruitful maxims, "that the will is the subject and  
 " principle of all error as well as sin (which indeed  
 " ought to be voluntary to make it culpable): that  
 " it is in our power to avoid error by suspending our  
 " judgement till the evidence be clear, though it is  
 " [*be*] not in our power to avoid ignorance or non-per-  
 " ception of many things, by reason of the limitedness of  
 " our faculties: that the fault of those that err is,  
 " that their wills run before their understandings, that  
 " they judge and pronounce before they perceive, or of  
 " things whereof they have really no perception, which,  
 " indeed, is a great fault, and the cause of all our dis-  
 " orders: that we are accountable for our judgements  
 " as well as for any of our other actions: and, lastly,  
 " that God is not the cause of any of our errors, which  
 " with respect to him are only negations, occasioned  
 " only by his not having given us larger capacities; but  
 " with respect to ourselves are privations, proceeding  
 " from the ill use we make of those natural capacities he  
 " has endued us with." All which great and momen-  
 " tous truths are grounded upon the very principle now  
 " laid down (which by this may appear to be something  
 " more than a curiosity), that judgement, however common-  
 " ly ascribed to the understanding, does yet really belong to  
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the will, and not to the understanding, whose operations are all terminated within the limits of perception. So well do these things cohere together, and so aptly does one truth hang and depend upon another.

12. But as right as I think this account of the matter to be, yet, considering what an innovation it is from the scholastic measures, and how like a paradox it looks, I think a little countenance from authority may do well to counterpoise the prejudice of singularity. And because this is a greater innovation than the precedent one, I shall back it with an authority proportionably greater than what was used upon the other occasion. \* "It may be well concluded from what has been said (says a modern writer, and whom I think I may venture to call a philosopher), that the understanding never judges, since it only perceives, or since judgements and even reasonings, with respect to the understanding, are only pure perceptions: that it is the will alone which truly judges, in acquiescing in that which the understanding represents to it, and involuntarily reposing itself therein. And that also it is that alone which leads us into error." Again, "I say then, that there is no other difference on the part of the understanding between a simple perception, judgement, and discourse, but that the understanding perceives a simple thing without any relation to any thing whatsoever, by a simple perception: that it perceives the relations between two or more things in judgement: and that, in fine, it perceives the relations that are between the relations of things in discourse. So that all the operations of the understanding are no other than pure perceptions." All which he further explains and confirms by an illustration taken from numbers, with some other very considerable reflections upon it; which, for brevity's sake, I leave the curious reader to consult, in order to his better satisfaction.

13. To this account of this most excellent person I fully agree as to the substance and matter of it, only

\* Recherche de la Vérité. Liv. I. p. 10.

would

would by his leave make some little alteration in the form of it; concerning which he had no occasion to be solicitous, as not designing a formal and exact division of the operations of the understanding; but only to shew that they were all no other than pure perceptions. And so far his representation of the matter is right, and so, I suppose, will the form of it be too if it run thus. The only operation of the understanding is perception; which perception is either simple or complex. Simple of the ideas themselves, and complex of their relations. Which complex perception is again twofold, immediate or mediate. Immediate when the relations of ideas are perceived by the perception and collation of the very ideas themselves, whose relations they are; mediate, when those relations are perceived by the help or mediation of some third idea, made use of as a common measure of comparing those ideas, which could not be so collated together as to have their relations perceived by themselves. And in this, I think, we have a right account of the operations of the understanding, both as to matter and form; the knowlege of which, considering how much spirit is above body, though it were only a piece of speculation and curiosity, I should think of greater worth and consideration than that of the properties of lines and figures, or any of the phenomenas of nature.

14. This complex perception, or the perception of the relations that are between ideas, I take to be the same with what we commonly call knowlege: which is usually defined by an evident assent, but I think not rightly. For an evident assent is the same as an assent upon evidence; that is, an assent to an evident thing, or to a thing whereof we have an evident perception. But now perception and assent are two things (the former being the ground of the latter), and it is in the perception, not in the assent, that knowlege properly consists. For knowlege is most certainly an act of the understanding; and it was shown before, that the only operation of that is perception. As for assent, that

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will

will be found to belong to another principle. For assent is no other than an affirmative judgement (for then a man is said to assent to a thing when he judges it to be so or so, and then to dissent when he judges it not to be so); and judgement, as was shown before, belongs to the will. Nor is it any thing to the contrary, that we necessarily assent to whatsoever we clearly perceive. This neither proves assent and perception to be one and the same, nor that assent does not belong to the will, but only that the will necessarily follows, and cannot possibly resist the clear light of the understanding; which is a great truth, but no objection. Assent therefore is always voluntary, though not always free; and, whether voluntary or free, is a plain act of the will embracing and acquiescing in what is represented to it by the understanding. And therefore, though we do always assent to what we evidently perceive, yet knowledge does not consist in the assent, but in the perception, which is the ground of that assent.

15. For, to push the matter a little further, though assent necessarily *follows* [*follow*] upon clear perception, and cannot be separated from it, yet sure we may use abstraction here, and consider perception without considering assent, the idea of the one not including the idea of the other. But now I would fain know whether he that clearly perceives the relations of things one to another, may not be truly said to understand or know those things? Or whether there be any thing further requisite to the understanding or knowledge of a thing, after a full and clear perception of it? If not (as I think no man that considers what he speaks will say that there is), then knowledge is supposed to be in its compleat and perfect act of being by perception alone, and that before any assent be given; which assent therefore cannot go to the making up of its nature, since it was supposed to be compleat without it. To which I add, that let our assent be joined with never so much evidence, still we are said to assent because we know, and to what we know. So that our knowledge is here pre-supposed to  
our



our assent, and consequently is in order of nature at least before it, and therefore cannot consist in it. I conclude therefore, that knowlege is not evident assent, but perception, particularly that perception which I call complex, the perception of the relations that are between ideas, whether as to agreement or disagreement. Which, I think, till we can meet with a better, may serve for a tolerable definition of knowlege.

16. But now whereas this complex perception (as was noted above) is either immediate or mediate; hence it is that our knowlege also admits of the same division, being either immediate or mediate, or, if you please, intuitive or demonstrative. Between which two the difference usually made is, that in intuitive knowlege we have an intire and simultaneous view of things, and see all at once; whereas in demonstrative knowlege our prospect opens by degrees, and we proceed step by step, advancing from the knowlege of one thing to that of another. This account indeed is true, but not explicit enough to make it clear: For it is characterizing from the effect only, and does not explain how our view in intuitive knowlege comes to be so intire, and in demonstrative so gradual and progressive. This therefore must be deduced higher, and explained by a more distinct principle. And I think we shall distinguish them more clearly and exactly by saying, That intuitive knowlege is when we perceive the agreement or disagreement of one idea with another immediately and by themselves, without the mediation or intervention of any other idea. Demonstrative, when this agreement or disagreement is perceived not immediately, by comparing the ideas with themselves, but mediately, by comparing them with a third; that is, when we perceive them to agree or disagree with themselves, as we find them to do so with some third idea, which we are oftentimes forced to make use of as a common measure, because we cannot always, by reason of the narrowness of our faculties, so collate and confront our other ideas together, as to see whether they agree or no [not] by their mere comparison.

17. This demonstrative knowlege is what in the schools is called Science, concerning which great stir is made, and variety of definitions given ; but which, by the measures already laid down, appears to be nothing else but a mediate preception, or the preception of the relations of ideas by the mediation of some other idea. This other idea is what we usually call a medium or proof, because it is the common measure whereby our ideas are compared, and the relations between them perceived. And it is the form and process of the understanding, using this middle idea as a measure whereby to perceive the agreement or disagreement of the others, according as they agree or disagree with this, that I would call reasoning, which is not the very same with science, but the way and method to it. For we are said to reason in order to know, and science is the effect of demonstration, according to that known saying in logick, *demonstratio est syllogismus scientiam pariens*.

18. If this account of reasoning be not clear enough to make it intelligible in itself, or to distinguish it from science, I would further explain it thus, by saying that reasoning (as I here consider it with respect to the understanding), is nothing else but the successive perception of each of the extreme ideas with the middle one, in order to perceive the union that is between them, by the union that they have with the middle idea. As, for example: I am to perceive that space is body; and not being able to perceive this by the immediate inspection of these two ideas, I call in a third to my assistance, and proceed to the perception of it thus: Whatever *is* [*be*] extended is body; space is extended, therefore space is body. Here it is plain that I perceive the union of the two extreme ideas Space and Body, by the successive perception of the union that each of them *have* [*has*] with the middle idea, extended. Now, the very perception itself of the union of the two extreme ideas, space and body, by the mediation of the third and middle one, is what I would call science: For it is in the formality of this mediate perception that I am said to know that space is body. But the  
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successive perception that I have of the union of each of these two extreme ideas with the middle idea, in order to perceive the union they have among themselves, is what I would call reasoning. Which certainly cannot be the very perception of the conclusion itself (for that would confound it with science), and yet must be perception too (or else it would not belong to the understanding), and therefore can be no other than this successive perception that I speak of. Whereby it may appear that the reasoning here specified, is not only distinct from science, but also from that reasoning which consists in illative affirmations and negations, and so is a species of judgement, and accordingly belongs to the will, not to the understanding, as was both remarked and accounted for before.

19. Those things which are known or perceived by intuitive knowlege, we call principles, and those things which are perceived by demonstrative knowlege, we call conclusions : which, though equally certain (because the objects of knowlege), are yet not so clear as principles, which serve, indeed, to the demonstration of other things, but need none themselves, as being visible by their own light ; and sometimes are so evident, that they are not so much as capable of any, but are strictly indemonstrable, there being nothing more clear than themselves whereby they may receive further evidence. We say of such propositions, “ That they “ are as clear as the light ; ” and there is more aptness in the comparison than all that use it, I believe, are aware of. For light is seen immediately and by itself, and not by the mediation of any thing else ; whereas all other things are seen by light. The light that is thus seen by itself answers to principles, and those other things which are seen by light answer to conclusions. And the resemblance holds as well on the part of the act, as of the object : for the *first* [former] of these ways of seeing answers to intuition, and the *last* [latter] to demonstration. So surprising is the agreement between vision and knowlege, and so strange and won-



derful the proportion in this, as well as in some other things, between the sensible and the intellectual world.

20. Intuition is by far the *most* [*more*] perfect and excellent way of knowlege, as being more clear, more simple, and more intire. More clear, for here we have all light without any mixture of darkness, whereas in the other there is one dark side. More simple, for here the mind perceives the truth by one single view, whereas in the other it is fain to multiply its perception. More intire, for here again we have the prospect lying altogether before us in its full and whole extent, whereas in the other it opens gradually and successively, the light stealing in upon us more and more as we go further and further, as it does upon men that travel towards the East. To which may be further added, that intuitive knowlege supposes and proceeds from perfection of the understanding, whose perceptive faculty is hereby argued to be very bright and clear. For it must be a very clear perception to perceive the relations of ideas by the very ideas themselves. Whereas demonstrative knowlege, and the necessity of reasoning in order to it, *is* [*are*] founded upon the narrowness of our intellectual capacities, which not being able to perceive the truth or falshood of a proposition by the single collation of the two ideas that compose it, are fain to make use of a third, as a common measure between them; and so, from the consideration of something more clear and better known, to proceed in the search of what is more obscure and less known. Accordingly, we attribute the way of intuition to the most perfect beings, God and Angels. Though, as to Angels, I make no great doubt but that, in the consideration of very compounded questions, and such as include a multiplicity of relations, they are fain to use reasoning as well as we (as in the more simple ones we use intuition as well as they), though perhaps after a much more perfect manner, and by such compendious and facilitating rules as we know nothing of. And, as they may be supposed, when they do reason, to reason better and more expeditely than we, so,  
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with equal probability, it may be presumed, considering the great disproportion of natures and states between us, that they use intuition in very many things, wherein we are forced to have recourse to reasoning.

21. Hereafter indeed, when, as the scripture tells us, all that is imperfect about us shall be done away, and we shall be *ισάγγελοι*, not only like, but equal to the Angels, we shall be able to see (it is to be hoped) by intuition too; and that many things which we here not only were ignorant of, but thought impossible; things that were not only above our reason, but, as we thought, contrary to it. We shall not only be able to reason better than we do now, but shall, in most things, not stand in need of any reasoning at all, but shall, with one simple view, glance over and through the relations of ideas, and so have an intire prospect of the fair field of truth. But at present we must travel it over, and that with many a weary step, there being but very few things that we know by intuition, no more than just to give us a taste of the great privilege of heaven, and to encourage both our desires and our hopes of that perfect state, when we shall be so far from needing any logick to direct us in our reasoning, that we shall have (in comparison) but little need or use even of reason itself. But, in this present state of our non-age and infirmity, our necessity of it is very great. For our intuition is so short-sighted, and reaches so very little a way, that, as, if we knew no more than what we can by *this* [*these*] means attain to, the compass of our knowlege would be so very scanty, that we should not have near light enough to direct us in our journey through the world; so if we would know more, and see to a further distance from us, we must assist our feeble eye by the advantage of a glass. Now, reason is this glass, naturally, indeed, a very good prospective, but which logick, and especially algebra, has improved into a telescope. But yet, still it is but an artificial way of seeing, and all art supposes and argues a defect in nature. And, though it be a great help, yet we know it is no very great commendation to a man's eye-sight to see with spectacles.

22. And

22. And why then are we proud? and why proud of that which should rather deject us, and make us humble, of our imperfections and our defects? Our natural reason is a mark of our limitation as creatures, and our artificial one of our infirmity as men, and both together give us but little light, and help us to see but a very little way off, and that after the most imperfect and defective manner, such as upbraids our ignorance at the very same time that it increases our knowledge, our reason not so much enlightening, as betraying the darkness of our understandings. Some few things, indeed, we know as angels do, by intuition (or else we could not so much as reason like men), but still the main fund of our knowledge lies in the rational and demonstrative kind, and we are fain to use clues and chains to conduct our thoughts through the infinite mazes and labyrinths of truth; to proceed in a train, from one thing to another; to walk step by step; and feel out our way with weariness and caution, like men that go in the dark. And such, indeed, is our state in this body and in this world. It is now a kind of night with us, as having for the most part only the *lesser* [*less*] light, reason, for our direction. As for the greater, intuition, we have little more of that than of the refracted beams of the sun a little before its rising, and after its setting, enough to make a twilight, a mixture of light and darkness, but such a mixture as is very unequal, darkness making the far greater part of the composition. And is not this consideration sufficient (if there were nothing else) to take down our pride, and inspire us with a sentiment of the profoundest humility and self-dejection. If not, let us consider, that even this *lesser* [*less*] light, that is to govern our present night and darkness, does oftentimes fail us, and suffer an eclipse: let us consider, that we have a darker side yet, and are subject to a much lower dispensation: there being many things, and those of the highest nature, and greatest importance, wherein our reason is utterly at a loss, and cannot help us out, and with respect to which being destitute of sight, we must be content to walk altogether by Faith. Concerning which in the following chapter.



## C H A P. II.

*Of Faith.*

1. **F**AITH is a term of great ambiguity as well as reason, but, not to insist upon the several acceptations of it, as it is used either in divine or in human writings, I shall only define in what sense I here take it, and then proceed to such considerations upon it as may serve to lay open its nature, so far as is requisite to the present design.

2. I do not take faith here for the object of faith, but for the act or habit of faith, and that not ethically considered, as it denotes the moral virtues of veracity, fidelity, honesty, and the like, but logically, as it signifies a certain assent, judgement, or persuasion of the mind, particularly that which is founded upon testimony or authority. So that the generical and common part of faith is assent, wherein it agrees with some other acts of the mind, and the more special and peculiar part that limits and contracts the general, and whereby the whole is differenced and distinguished, is the motive and ground of this assent. It is, it seems, an assent grounded not upon the internal reason and evidence of the thing, but upon the bare testimony and authority of the speaker.

3. For, I consider that there are two general grounds of assent, reason, and authority. That is, we assent to a thing either because we have some perception or knowledge of it ourselves, or because its truth is declared to us by another upon whose knowledge and veracity we think we may safely depend. If the reason or evidence of the thing be imperfect and incomplete, that is, if we perceive only in part, then we yield a partial and imperfect assent, mixed with some fear or suspicion of the contrary, which is what we call opinion. But if the evidence be full and perfect, then we yield a firm and most assured assent, which is generally distinguished from the other by the name of knowledge, which, according

to the common notion and definition of it, is an evident assent. But it was shown before, that knowledge does not formally consist in the assent, but in the perception which is the ground of the assent. And, indeed, how is it possible it should consist in any thing else? For (to give yet a further confirmation to what has been already offered upon this occasion) let assent be never so evident, the evidence lies in the perception, not in the assent; which of itself is a blind dark act of the mind, and can be said no otherwise to be evident, than as it is an assent to an evident thing, that is, to what we perceive. But, now, perception and assent are not only two things, but such as belong also to two different and distinct faculties, and therefore can never join together to make up knowledge, which is an act only of one. And, indeed, to speak the truth, evident assent (as it is here applied) seems to me a mere jumble of words confusely uniting together, in one idea, operations that belong to distinct faculties, one belonging to the will, and the other to the understanding. And how the result of this heterogeneous composition should be knowledge, I must confess to be indeed a mystery above my comprehension. And, besides, after all, an evident assent, when resolved into more words, will amount to the same as an assent to what we know; and would it not be a notable definition of knowledge, to say, that it is, "an assent to what we know?"

4. If then knowledge be not an evident assent, and, indeed, as to the formality of it, *has* [*have*] nothing of assent in it, as consisting purely and wholly in perception, it is plain that this assent to an evident thing ought not to be called knowledge. For it is necessary that the several species of assent, should all have the general nature of assent in them; and, consequently, this, being a certain species of assent, must partake of the nature of assent in general, which it cannot do if it be knowledge, for that were to pass over into another kind, knowledge not being assent, but perception. It is therefore most clear and evident, that our common systems have here also

also gone upon a wrong ground, and that knowlege ought not to be put into the number of the three assents (which are usually reckoned to be faith, opinion, and science); since the assent, whose ground is full evidence, and which is the only one that may pretend, and is commonly presumed, to be knowlege, is most apparently not so, as differing from it no less than in the whole kind.

5. If then it be demanded by what name I would distinguish this second assent to a thing, when the evidence is full and complete, from the former, wherein the evidence is supposed not to be so perfect, I answer, that indeed (so little have these things been considered as they ought) there is no proper name, that I know of, for it. When we assent to a thing of incomplete evidence, we call it opinion, and when we assent to a thing whose evidence is complete, this has been usually called knowlege; but certainly with the utmost impropriety, knowlege, as appears, being quite another thing. But by what name to call it, or how to distinguish it, I profess I know not. Not for want of real difference and distinction in the thing (for my thought of it is very distinct), but merely because we want a word for it. As we do in like manner for assent upon reason in general, to distinguish it from assent upon authority in general. For, as assent upon authority in general, abstracting from human or divine, is called faith, so also assent upon reason in general, abstracting from complete or incomplete, should be called somewhat, if one could tell what, as every generical idea ought to be distinguished by a generical name. But since our language affords not any one word that will serve to either of these purposes, we must be content with the *definitio* instead of the *definitum*, and express things at large, by saying assent upon reason or evidence, and assent upon such evidence as is full and complete, which is sufficient to distinguish it from assent upon evidence incomplete, though we have no one proper word for this as we have for the other, which is fitly called opinion, whereby we denote the  
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imperfection both of the evidence and of the assent.

6. But, now, if the assent be not grounded upon any internal reason or evidence of the thing at all, but only upon testimony or authority, then we call it faith. Which appears to be an assent of a quite different nature from the other two. For they both agree in the general nature of assent upon evidence, and differ only as the evidence differs, and that is gradually, as complete differs from incomplete. But faith differs from them both in the whole kind, as having no evidence at all, but only authority for its ground. And thus we have here a threefold assent (though not such as is taught us in the schools), the account of which in short proceeds thus. All assent in general is either upon reason or authority. If the reason be incomplete, then it is opinion. If complete, then it is another kind of assent for which as yet there wants a name, as also there does for assent upon reason in general. But if the assent be upon authority only, then it is faith.

7. Now this authority may be either of God or of Man. If the authority whereupon our assent is grounded be of man, then the assent that is so grounded is human faith. If of God, then it is divine faith. Between which two there is this in common, that they both proceed not upon the internal light and evidence of the thing, but upon authority, and so agree in the general nature of faith, only as the authority differs so the faith also varies, and human authority differing from divine just as much as fallible differs from infallible, the same in proportion will also be the difference between human and divine faith. That is, the former will always be a fallible, and the latter an infallible assent.

8. Human faith (though sometimes as actually undeceived as divine) is yet always liable to error and deception, and so doubtful, hazardous, and uncertain, even when actually true, like a conclusion drawn from uncertain premises; in which respect it resembles opinion, and that so much that some have confounded it with

with it, though I think illogically enough, since though there be a like uncertainty in both assents, yet they differ extremely in their formal motives, one being grounded upon reason, and the other upon authority. And the distinction of these assents is not taken from the degree of certainty wherein they agree, but from the quality of the motive wherein they differ. However, though this *makes* [*make*] a great difference in notion, it makes none in the affairs of civil life, and the faith of him, that believes the testimony of a man, will, as to all real intents and purposes, go for no more than his opinion. And that because, though different assents as to the formality of their motives, they are yet much at one rate for certainty, being both fallible in their grounds, and so subject to error and deception.

9. But the case is quite otherwise as to divine faith, whose foundation stands too sure not only to be overturned, but even so much as shaken. This faith is strictly and absolutely infallible, not subject to the least error, or possibility of erring, as having the very ground and pillar of truth itself, the omniscience and veracity of God, for its security, than which there neither needs, nor can be greater. It is most certain that God is both actively and passively infallible; his omniscience will not suffer him to be deceived himself, and his infinite veracity and truth will not suffer him to deceive us. And, therefore, he that builds his faith upon his authority, goes upon the most sure grounds, and cannot possibly err in his assent. And as he is secure from error, so he is also from all just reason of scruple or fear, and leaning upon a firm and indefectible support, may stay and repose himself upon it with full acquiescence. So that there is all the certainty that can be in this faith, both objective and subjective, that of the thing, and that of the person. The thing assented to is most undoubtedly true in itself, and he that assents to it may be most firmly assured and persuaded of the truth of it in his own mind, and, among all temptations to doubt

and distrust may with great triumph and confidence say with the apostle, "I know whom I have believed." (2 Tim. 1. 12.)

10. It was observed a little before of human faith, that it resembles opinion, in as much as they are both dubious and uncertain assents, as proceeding upon grounds of like uncertainty, though otherwise of different natures. Now, as this faith resembles opinion, so in like manner it may be observed of divine faith that it resembles science, or, rather, that second assent (for so I am forced to call it for want of a better name) which we lately discoursed of, and placed between opinion and faith. The comparison here bears the same proportion as to certainty, as it did in the other case as to uncertainty. Divine faith has all the certainty that is possible, and therefore, to be sure, as much as science or that second assent can have. There is as much certainty in the thing assented to, and there may be as much assurance and firmness of persuasion in the assent itself; or, in other words, what a man believes upon the authority of God is in itself as certain as what he knows, and he may also be as certain of it. For he that assents to a thing upon full evidence, can but assent fully and perfectly without suspense or hesitation; and so also can he that assents to a thing upon divine authority only. His ground is every whit as firm and sure as the other's, and why then should the measure of his assurance be less? It cannot possibly be, if he *knows* [*know*] and *considers* [*consider*] upon what ground he stands. So that thus far, both in regard of the certainty of the object, and the firmness of the persuasion, divine faith may be justly placed upon a level with the most evident assent whatever.

11. Nor, I suppose, will this be thought an undue elevation of divine faith. On the contrary, I expect to be complained of for setting the dignity of it at too low a pitch by those who say that divine faith is firmer than science. But it is for want of the latter that these men so excessively extol the former. I call it ex-



excessively, because it is what, strictly and exactly speaking, cannot be. For what I perceive or know, is even by that very supposition unquestionably true (or else I cannot be said to know it), and what I believe upon the highest authority can be no more. To say therefore that faith is firmer than science, is like saying that one straight line is straighter than another. But perhaps their meaning only is, that it is safer relying upon the authority of God than upon our own rational faculties, which indeed is right, and I heartily wish all men were convinced of it. For though what I do actually and really know be to the full as true and certain as what I believe, and I can no more be out in one than in the other; yet it is more certain in the general that God cannot deceive me, than that my reason cannot be deceived. Not that what I assent to by divine faith can have a greater objective certainty than what I clearly and distinctly perceive or know, but only that there is a possibility, not to say danger, of my taking [of] that for a clear and distinct perception which indeed is not so; and so, though I cannot be deceived in what I do truly know, yet I may be deceived in thinking that I know when I do not. So that divine faith, though not more certain than knowledge itself, is yet of greater certainty than our knowing faculties; and, generally speaking, the believer goes upon surer grounds than the man of reason and demonstration. Because his reason may possibly lead him into error, whereas the other's authority cannot. And when they are both in the right, yet still there will be this difference between them, that his reason is only not deceived, whereas the other's faith is infallible.

12. And thus far we have taken a view of the more bright and perfect side of divine faith; I mean that of its firmness and certainty, in respect of which it stands upon a just level with science. But it has also a more dark side, in which respect it comes short of it, and must give it the precedency. And I think it may be

very properly called a dark side, because it consists in darkness and obscurity, and which is still so much the darker, because it is so peculiar to faith, and makes so great a part of its character, being the main difference that distinguishes it from science, or that second assent before spoken of. For as to firmness and certainty, therein they agree. For faith may be firm, because he that believes in God may be supposed not in the least to hesitate or doubt of the truth of what he reveals. And it is also certain, because it relies upon the most certain foundation, the testimony of God, who is infallible himself, and cannot deceive. And hitherto they run parallel one to the other. But here begins both the difference and the disproportion, that there is clearness and evidence on the side of science, and that second assent, whereas there is none on the side of faith, which walks indeed upon firm ground, but altogether in the dark. For he that believes does not give his assent because either by sense or reason he perceives the object of his faith to be thus or thus, but merely because he has the word and authority of God for it. Which, though it be sufficient to found a firm and certain, is yet, however, not enough to beget a clear and evident, assent. So that the great and distinguishing character of science and the second assent, is light and evidence; and that of faith, inevidence and obscurity, which accordingly is commonly said to be an inevident assent. But how, and in what sense it is so, seems not commonly to be so well understood; and, for the consequence of what depends upon the right stating of it, deserves to be explained with all possible exactness.

13. In order to which we are carefully to distinguish between the thing believed, and the reason or motive that induces us to believe it; even as in knowledge we distinguish between the thing known, and the argument or medium by which it is known, the *scitum* and the *formalis ratio sciendi*. The thing believed, I would call the matter or the object of faith, and the motive that induces

duces me to believe it, I would call the formal reason of faith. \* Aquinas, I know, calls them both objects, and then after distinguishes them by calling the former the material object, and the latter the formal object of faith. Accordingly, he says, that "the formal object of faith is the first truth," meaning (as he afterward explains himself) that faith relies upon the truth of God as its medium, or argument. Which medium I chuse rather to call (and I think more intelligibly) the formal reason, than the formal object of faith. Since the term (object) seems more properly to design the matter of faith, or the thing believed, and is hardly applicable to the motive or reason of believing. However, since we both mean one and the same thing, there need [*needs*] be no debate upon the different manner of expressing it; especially since, if any one think his term more intelligible and expressive of the notion intended by it, or *has* [*have*] any reverence for it upon any other consideration, he is at liberty to substitute it in the room of the other.

14. This necessary distinction being premised, it is, in the first place, to be well heeded, that when faith is said to be an obscure and inevident assent, this obscurity or inevidence is not to be applied to the formal reason or motive of faith, but only to the matter or object of it. I say not to the formal reason of it. For as there may be in general a clear reason why a man should believe an obscure thing, so it is most certain that the formal reason for which we assent to the things of faith is very clear. For this formal reason is no other than the authority of God; or, rather, since this includes the truth of the revealer as well as the revelation itself (for otherwise of what authority would be the revelation), I would chuse to say that the truth and revelation of God do jointly make up the formal reason of divine faith, which accordingly proceeds upon this double

\* 222. Q. 1. Art. 1.



principle, 1. That whatever God *reveals* [*reveal*] is true. 2. That this or that thing in particular is revealed by God. For faith has its reasons as well as science (though of another nature), and its reasons are these two, as will more distinctly appear by disposing the process of faith into a syllogistical form, which will be this :

Whatever *is* [*be*] revealed by God is true,  
 This is revealed by God,  
 Therefore this is true.

The conclusion of this syllogism contains both the matter and the act of faith, as it is an assent to such a thing upon such a ground, which is implied by the illative particle therefore. The two other propositions contain the ground itself or the formal reason of faith, which you see consists of the double principle before-mentioned. Now, it is most apparent, that these two principles are both of them sufficiently clear, or at least may be so. It is clear, in the first place, that whatever *is* [*be*] revealed by God is true. This is either self-evident, or may be proved from the idea of God, and so has either the light of a principle, or of a conclusion, either an immediate or a mediate evidence. And it may be also clear (and, to be sure, is so whenever our faith *is* [*be*] well grounded) that such a thing in particular is revealed by God. And in both these respects it is true (what is commonly said) that "Faith is the highest reason." For you see it is perfectly reasonable in its fund and principle, and does at last resolve, as much as any mathematical conclusion, into a rational ground of unquestionable light and evidence. With this only difference, that a conclusion in geometry is founded upon a ground taken from within, from the intrinsic nature of the thing; whereas our conclusion of faith proceeds upon a ground taken from without, viz. from the authority of God, but such as, however, in light and evidence, is no way inferior to the other.

15. This by the way may serve to shew the vanity and impertinence of those, who, when they are to prove that there is nothing in christianity above reason, run out into a popular vein of harangue about the reasonableness of the christian religion, and its great accommodation to human nature, crying out, with repeated importunity, that man is a reasonable creature, christianity a reasonable service, and faith a rational act, nay even the highest reason, and the like. As if we were for a blind and unaccountable faith, and denied the use of reason in religion, or that faith was founded upon reason. Or as if because there is a reason from without for believing, therefore the thing believed might not from within, and as to the inward matter of it, be above reason, so as not to be comprehended or accounted for by it. But this will cross my way again in another place (chap. 7. art. 9.); and therefore I shall not anticipate here what further considerations I may have occasion to bestow upon it there.

16. To return, therefore, I say that this obscurity and inevidence that is in faith, and upon whose account it is commonly said to be an inevident assent, does not belong to its formal reason (which you see may be clear enough, as clear as any principle of natural science), but only to the matter or object of it. That is, in other words, the inevidence does not lie in the reason of believing, but in the nature of the thing believed. Not that the matter of faith again is wholly and all over without evidence (for then there would be no reason to believe it), but only that it has no evidence from within, and from the nature of the thing itself, as was remarked before. Not that this again is so to be understood, neither, as if the proposition to be believed were not so much as simply intelligible as to the very literal sense and direct signification of its terms. No, we are no more to believe we know not what, than to believe we know not why; and whatever darkness there may be in faith, it is still so much a luminous assent, and an act of reason, as to require that we understand the simple meaning

meaning of the proposition we are to believe, as well as the grounds of credibility upon which it challenges our assent. For the general object of faith is truth, and truth is the relation of connexion between ideas; I say ideas, for truth does not lie in sounds or words, but in things. Therefore, to believe such a thing to be true, is the same as to believe that there is a connexion between such ideas. But then a man must know what those ideas are, or else how can he believe they are connected. Therefore, he must understand something more than the terms themselves; he must also have the ideas of those terms, which is the same as to understand the meaning and signification of them. And, indeed, he that has no idea or conception of what he believes, believes he knows not what; and he that believes he knows not what, cannot be properly said to believe any thing. In all faith, therefore, the proposition must be simply intelligible, and though the truth of it be to be believed, yet the meaning of it must be understood.

17. For we are again carefully to distinguish between the meaning of a proposition, and the truth of a proposition. The meaning of a proposition is only the determination of the ideas that are signified by such terms; the truth of it is the union or connexion that is between those ideas. Now, though a man *does* [*do*] not see the connexion that is between the ideas of that proposition he is said to believe; yet he must in some measure perceive the ideas themselves, because, in believing the proposition, he is supposed to believe that such ideas are so related and connected together. When, therefore, it is said that the matter of faith is inevident as to the intrinsic nature of the thing, the inevidence must not be thought to lie in the ideas whereof the proposition to be believed consists, but in the connexion of those ideas; that is, not in the meaning of the proposition, but in the truth of it, which is properly the object of faith, as the ideas themselves are of perception. Which again, by the way, may serve to discover another instance



instance of impertinency in the reasoning of those, who, when they are maintaining that there can be no article of faith above reason, divert into pompous flourishes and declamations about the intelligibility of the objects of faith, and the utter impossibility of believing what is not intelligible. As if we denied the simple intelligibility of the proposition, or would have men believe they know not what (which certainly would be a strange degree of implicit faith, and more nonsensical than that of the collier) ; or, as if that proposition, which is clear enough as to its simple meaning, might not be inevident, and so above reason, as to its truth ; or, in other words, as if clearness of ideas might not consist with obscurity of their connexion.

18. But then it must be observed again, that when we say that the inevidence that is in the matter of faith respects the truth of the proposition, not the meaning of it, or the connexion of the ideas, and not the very ideas themselves, this is not so to be understood neither, as if the matter of faith, even thus considered, were absolutely, and in itself necessarily, inevident, and such as could not possibly be known without altering its nature, and ceasing to be any longer the object of faith. I know the contrary supposition has prevailed in some schools, where it passes almost for principle and maxim, that knowledge and faith are mutually exclusive of each other, that the same thing cannot be at once the object of both, and that therefore, if a thing be believed, it cannot be known, and, if known, that it cannot be believed. St. Austin was of this opinion, and has in many places declared his mind to this purpose, particularly in his XL Treatise (tom. 9. p. 107.) of his Exposition upon St. John's Gospel. And his authority has recommended it (as it did most other things) to several of the schoolmen, particularly Aquinas, whence it has been transmitted down among many modern writers of the systematical way, both philosophers and divines. But we must follow reason before authority, and whoever can be prevailed with to lay the matter quite aside,  
and

and to use the other as he ought, will, I believe, clearly perceive that nothing hinders but that the same proposition may be at once the object of both faith and science, or that the same thing may be at the same time both known and believed, provided it be by different mediums, according to the diversity of the respective acts.

19. For not to enter into the wrangle and dust of the schools upon this occasion, it may be sufficient to consider that there is no manner of opposition between faith and knowledge, or the most evident assent as to the essence of the proposition (that being not supposed to be denied in the one which is affirmed in the other, or the contrary), but only as to the medium of the act. And that it is not the absolute nature of the thing believed, but the quality of the motive that specifies faith, and distinguishes it from other assents. So that it is no matter what the absolute nature of the thing be in itself, whether it be evident or not evident, knowable or not knowable, provided it be assented to upon the proper medium and motive of faith, that is, upon authority, without any respect had to the natural evidence of the thing, though otherwise never so evident in its own absolute nature, so as to be the object of science (though upon a different medium) at the same time. For, as I said before, it is not the nature of the thing, but the quality of the medium that specifies faith; and though the same thing cannot have two natures, or be in itself at once evident and not evident, yet why may it not sustain two different relations, or be considered in two different mediums, so as to be said to be known when perceived by its evidence, and to be believed when assented to upon authority? Which certainly may be done as fully, and with as little regard to its evidence, as if there were no evidence in the thing at all. So that the evidence of the thing does not hinder the belief of it, supposing the belief not to proceed upon that evidence, but upon its own proper medium, authority.

20. But

20. But to use a way of arguing less abstract, though it may be with some more pressing and convincing. Suppose God should reveal to me a geometrical truth, as that two triangles having the same base, and being within the same parallels, are equal; and I, who at first received it upon his bare authority, should come afterwards to be able to demonstrate it myself upon the known principles of art. Who that well considers the natures of these things would say that my science evacuated my faith, and that I ceased to be a believer as soon as I became a mathematician? For though I *am* [*be*] now supposed to know what before I only believed, yet why should this knowledge destroy my faith, since I may still have as much regard for the authority of God, and as little to the evidence of the thing, as I had before the demonstration, and would still be ready to assent to it, though there were no evidence to be produced for it, only upon the ground of divine authority? And, to use another sensible, though not so artificial [*a*] way of arguing, I would fain know whether any one of those who are of the contrary sentiment would refuse a demonstrative account of a revealed truth, suppose the creation of the world, merely for fear of injuring or destroying his faith, which yet he were bound in conscience to do, if knowledge and faith were so exclusive of each other, and inevidence and obscurity were so absolutely of the essence of faith as some pretend. For then it would not be lawful to acquire the natural knowledge of any revealed truth, because it is unlawful to destroy one's faith; and every believer would have just reason to fear all further light and information about what he believes, which yet I think would be acknowledged by all an extravagant scruple, such as can hardly enter, much less stay long in, any considering head; and is withal contrary to a plain exhortation of the apostle, who bids us add to our faith knowledge. (2 Pet. 5. 1.)

21. When, therefore, the matter of faith, as it is taken for the truth of the proposition believed, is charged with



with obscurity, and faith itself upon that account is said (as it commonly is) to be of inevident things, the meaning ought not to be of an absolute, but of a relative inevidence. Not that what is believed is so all over dark and obscure that it cannot (while believed) absolutely be known, but only that it cannot under that formality, and so far as it is believed, being necessarily in that respect inevident, how bright or clear soever it may be in other respects. That is, in other words, though the thing believed, absolutely considered, may be evident, yet it is not so as believed, or in relation to faith, because that has no regard to the evidence how bright soever it may shine, but proceeds wholly upon another argument, between which and the evidence of the thing there is not the least affinity or communication. The short is, the object of faith, simply and absolutely speaking, may admit of evidence; but then, though it be never so evident and demonstrable in itself, yet, as believed, it is always obscure, faith having no regard to the proper light and evidence of the thing, but only to the testimony of the revealer, whose bare authority is the only motive that determines her assent, and the only ground upon which she lays the whole weight of it; though the truth of the thing in itself, absolutely considered, may also stand upon other foundations, be rationally accounted for by arguments from within, and so be seen by its own light. But let the light shine never so bright upon the object from other sides, faith lets in none, nor has any regard to that which she finds there, but connives at it, and walks (as I may say) with her eyes shut, contenting herself with the certainty of revelation, and leaving to science (if there be any) the evidence of the thing. So that the object is always dark to her, how clear and bright soever it may be in itself, or appear, when absolutely considered, to a philosophic eye. In which respect it falls very short of the perfection of science, though, in respect of firmness and certainty, it be equal to it, as was said before. All which is briefly couched

in that excellent account of faith given by the author to the Hebrews, when he says, that it is the "substance of things hoped for, and the argument of things not seen" (Heb. 11. 1.). Where by substance and argument he equals it with science in regard of the firmness and certainty of the assent, but by saying that it is of things not seen, he makes it vail, and stoop to it in point of evidence, in which respect indeed faith, as firm and as certain as it is, is as much inferior to science, as darkness is to light.

22. To gather up then what has been here discoursed at large concerning the inevidence of faith into one view. When we say that faith is an inevident assent, we are not to understand this inevidence of the formal reason of faith, but of the matter of it. And when we say that the matter of it is inevident, we should not intend by it that it is wholly and all over without evidence, but only that it has none from within or from the intrinsic nature of the thing. And when we say that the matter of faith is inevident from within, this again is not to be intended of the simple meaning of the proposition, but of the truth of it. And when we say that the truth of it is inevident, this again, lastly, is not to be understood, as if it were always and necessarily so in its own absolute nature, but only so far forth as it is believed, or as it is considered under the formality of an object of faith. Or, in other words, the inevidence of the matter of faith, in respect of the truth of the article, is not an absolute but a relative inevidence. Not that the matter of faith is never absolutely and in the nature of the thing inevident (for it may be so too, as will be seen afterwards), but only that it is not necessarily so, there being no reason from the nature of faith that requires it should, which may consist with evidence, though it *proceeds* [*proceed*] not upon it, and *has* [*have*] no regard to it as a motive. So then the formal reason of faith is always clear, the matter of it absolutely considered may be clear or not clear, as it happens, according as the nature of the

F thing

thing is, but as believed, or as considered under the formality of being the object of faith, so it is always inevident and obscure, as being not supposed to be assented to for the sake of its evidence (even when it has any), but wholly upon another account, already sufficiently represented.

23. And thus, having struck some light into the darkness of faith, by stating and explaining, with what exactness I could, in what sense it is an inevident assent, I cannot forbear observing by the way (though a little of the soonest), of what service this account may be towards the grand question of believing things above reason. For, if faith be an inevident assent, so far, at least, as not to respect the evidence of its object, why may not a thing be believed though it be above reason? For what though it be above reason, is it therefore above faith? Has faith any regard to evidence? Or is it determined by any rational motive, I mean, that is taken from the nature of the object? Even when a thing is evident, faith is not supposed to assent to it because of its evidence, and why then may not a thing be believed though it be not evident? Some contend that faith and evidence cannot possibly consist together, and, according to them, not only what is inevident may be believed, but whatever *is* [be] believed must be inevident. But this I look upon, and have already shewn to be a mistake. And it is a mistake in the extremity too. For I take it to be every whit as much an extreme to say that the object of faith is always inevident, as to say that it is always evident. However, it is always inevident so far as believed, which is the middle point between the two extremes. The nature of faith requires, at least, this relative inevidence of the object, whatever it be in its own nature, and we need no more. For, if the object of faith be always inevident so far as believed, then will it not follow that it may be believed though inevident? For my part, I see nothing that should hinder this consequence, if the principle it proceeds upon be right. The principle



ciple is (and a very moderate one sure, the generality of writers straining the matter a great deal higher), that the object of faith is inevident as far as believed. The consequence is, that therefore a thing may be believed, though inevident. It is true, indeed, one of these is an absolute, and the other only a relative inevidence. But this signifies nothing to the argument. For why may not a thing, really and in itself inevident, be believed, when even that which is evident is considered by faith as inevident? Why, then, it is all one (as to faith) as if it were so indeed; for what does the evidence signify, or what real alteration does it make, if faith *has* [*have*] no regard to it, nor consideration of it? And what should hinder, then, but that a thing really inevident may be believed, especially if revealed by God himself, and concerning himself. The short is, faith, as faith, has no regard to evidence (I mean that of the thing), and faith, as divine, has no need of it; and, therefore, why an inevident thing may not be believed, is what I do not understand, and would be glad to learn.

24. But to return (for I look upon this as too much a digression from the present, and too much a prevention of what is to follow, to be further pursued). After having thus discoursed of the nature of faith in general, and the double distribution of it into human and divine, with proper considerations upon each of them, it remains that it be now further considered that each of these may be either explicit or implicit. Then we are said to believe explicitly, when we believe determinately such or such a thing in particular, distinctly knowing what that particular thing is. And then implicitly, when we believe indeterminately and at large whatever *is* [*be*] proposed to us by such an authority, not knowing what in particular is proposed, or what it is we believe. Which, though it *seems* [*seem*] to carry the appearance of an assent too blind and hood-winked to be the act of a reasonable creature, may yet, in its proper place, become him as much as the other; and, indeed, is every whit as rational an assent in its ground and

principle. For all explicit faith is founded upon implicit, and has implicit faith in it.

25. To understand both this and the nature of implicit faith the better, we are to consider (what has been already intimated) that faith proceeds upon premisses, as well as science, and is the conclusion of a syllogism. And I further note (what perhaps may not be unworthy the observation of the curious), that the major proposition in faith explicit, is the conclusion in faith implicit, as may be seen in the syllogism before set down.

Whatever *is* [*be*] revealed by God is true,  
This is revealed by God,  
Therefore this is true.

The major proposition here (whatever *is* [*be*] revealed by God is true), is the conclusion of implicit faith, whose act is as much to believe to be true whatever God *reveals* [*reveal*], as the act of explicit faith is to believe that this or that in particular is so. So that explicit faith proceeds upon implicit, borrows from it its conclusion for its principle, and begins where the other leaves off. Just as, in the subalternation of sciences, that which is a conclusion in one is a principle in the other, so it is here in the subalternation of these two faiths, whereof that which is explicit may be said to be subalternated to that which is implicit. Let not any, therefore, vilify or disparage implicit faith as a blind and irrational assent, since it lays a ground for explicit, which serves itself of it, using its conclusion as a principle, even as what is a conclusion in geometry is a principle in perspective. And as geometry is therefore accounted the superior science, so ought implicit faith to be reckoned as the superior faith, upon whose conclusion the other proceeds, and which itself proceeds thus,

Whatever

Whatever *is* [*be*] revealed by him that is infallible is true,

God is infallible,

Therefore whatever *is* [*be*] revealed by God is true.

Here, besides that it is plain to be seen that the conclusion of this last syllogism is the principle of the precedent one, and that explicit faith supposes what is proved in implicit; it may be further noted, that implicit faith (as being the highest degree of faith) is due only to the highest, that is, to an infallible authority, the reason why whatever *is* [*be*] revealed by God is here concluded to be true, being, because he is infallible. Infallibility, then, is the proper ground of implicit faith; and, accordingly, the church of Rome, assuming to herself the character of infallible, does, upon that supposition, rightly require it. I say, upon that supposition, for she is right enough in her consequence, supposing her principle to be true. But the truth of it is, that is most extravagant, and such as carries in it such matchless arrogance and presumption as *befits* [*befit*] only him “who, as God, sitteth in the temple of “God, shewing himself that he is God (2 Thes. 2. 4).” For God only is infallible, and therefore he only has right to require implicit faith. And to him, indeed, it is due from every one of his creatures in the highest measure imaginable, as is also implicit obedience upon the same ground. Of both which we have a signal example in Abraham (Heb. 11. 8.), who, when he was called by God to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance; is said, “by “faith to have obeyed, and to have gone out, not “knowing whither he went.”

26. But now what can be more dark and inevident than this implicit faith? Its formal reason, indeed, is sufficiently clear, and it resolves at last into a ground highly rational, and so may be said in that respect to be the highest reason. For certainly nothing can be more reasonable than to believe whatever God (who is infal-



libile) *reveals* [*reveal*]. There is, therefore, no darkness on this side. Nay, even the light itself does not shine more clear. But, as for the matter of it (if I may call it so where nothing distinctly is believed), that is sure as dark and obscure as can well be conceived, so dark as even to be invisible. For a man to believe at large, without any restriction or limitation, whatever God shall propose to him, let it be what it will, not knowing what that is (like Abraham's going, "not knowing whither he went"), is such a dark and obscure act of faith, as has nothing clear in it but the humility and devotion of him who so believes. This is a faith worthy of God, as well as peculiar to him, and it is the great inevidence and obscurity of it that makes it so. For, so far is the matter of it from having any evidence in it, that it is not so much as evident what the matter of it is. Here, then, is the very blackness of darkness; and he that has this infolded faith (as every true believer has), and can thus trust God in the dark, where he sees nothing but only the general reason of his so doing, is not likely, in any of the more explicit instances of it, to plead the inevidence of the article to excuse his infidelity, or to deny his faith to an otherwise sufficiently clear revelation, merely because it is above his shallow reason.

27. Upon what has been hitherto discoursed, it will not be difficult to give, in few words, a satisfactory resolution of a celebrated question, which, among the schoolmen, has made a great many, and that is, whether faith *belongs* [*belong*] to the understanding or to the will: it is plain, by the measures already laid down, that it belongs to the latter. For faith (as all acknowledge) is an assent, and assent is a species of judgment, and judgment (as has been shewn already) is an act of the will, not of the understanding, whose only operation is perception, and, consequently, faith is an act of the will consenting to, embracing, acquiescing, and reposing itself in what the understanding represents as proposed and revealed by God. And, indeed, unless  
judg-

judgment, and, consequently, faith, did belong to the will as their proper and immediate principle, it is impossible to conceive how a man should be blame-worthy for any of his opinions; or how he should stand accountable either for error on the one hand, or for infidelity and heresy on the other. For, if faith be an act of the understanding, then, since the only operation of the understanding is perception, the greatest fault of an infidel or a heretic will be non-perception, which, indeed, is not error but ignorance; whereas infidelity and heresy are always supposed to include error, and to be also the worst of errors. And this non-perception is only a negation, and such as resolves into want of parts, which is not a moral but a natural defect, whereas infidelity and heresy (as indeed all that is faulty) are understood to be privations and defects of a moral nature. But, then, to make them so, they must be voluntary (nothing being faulty but what is so), that is, again, they must be wilful, that is, they must be acts of the will; and, consequently, faith, which is the habit whereof those sins are privations, must also belong to the same principle, or else, in short, there would be neither virtue in having it, nor vice in being without it. And, accordingly, our Saviour, in upbraiding the Jews with infidelity, does all along not only by consequence, but directly and expressly, charge it upon their wills: "Ye will not come to me, that ye may have life" (Joh. 5. 40.).

28. And thus I have gone through what I intended, and what indeed is of greatest consideration, upon this subject of faith. In the account of which, if I differ from any authors of the better character that have either professedly or occasionally written upon it, particularly Baronius and Dr. Pearson, it is not that I love to lay aside great authorities, or affect to be by myself, but because I follow the best light of my understanding, write with freedom and ingenuity what I think, and endeavour to represent things as they are, without having regard to authority any further than I think it joined with

with truth and reason. Which shall also be my rule in what remains of this treatise. In the mean time, what has been hitherto discoursed concerning reason and faith may serve as a good preparation in order to an account of the great question concerning the belief of things above reason. But, before we enter upon any thing of that nature, it is fit the distinction of *above reason*, and *contrary to reason*, be considered and rightly stated, which is the task allotted for the next chapter.

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### C H A P. III.

#### *The Distinction of things Contrary to Reason, and Above Reason, Considered.*

1. **T**HERE are some distinctions in the world that are without a difference, though difference be the ground of all distinction; and this by some is pretended to be of that number, who will have the parts of it to be coincident, and that *contrary to reason* and *above reason* signify in reality alike, and are but different expressions for one and the same thing. And, though they may be reasonably suspected to do this to serve the interest of a cause for whose advantage it would be to have this distinction taken away, yet they have the confidence to charge the same upon those that hold it, pretending that it is only a dextrous shift and evasion invented by subtle men as an expedient to relieve the distress of a desperate argument, when there is nothing else to be said for it.

2. Which of these is the evasion, either the denying or the allowing [ *of* ] this distinction, will best appear by the examination of it, which, besides its serviceableness



ableness to our clearer proceeding in what we are now upon, I am the rather induced to undertake, because (as Mr. Boyle observes in a little treatise upon this subject) “there are divers that employ this distinction, “few that have attempted to explain it, and none “that has taken care to justify it.” Indeed he himself is the only person that I know of that has written professedly about it (and I cannot but wonder that a thing of such curiosity and importance should be so little considered), though I think he has not gone to the bottom of the subject, nor is sufficiently clear even as far as he goes. However, because he has some considerable observations upon it (as indeed his thoughts are generally very good), and there is no reason why we should refuse any additional light in so dark and untrodden a way, I shall, for the further advantage and illustration of the matter, first draw up into a short view what that excellent person has meditated concerning it, with such occasional remarks as I shall think necessary, and then proceed to state the thing according to my own conceptions, hoping that between us both it will be sufficiently cleared, and that nothing of any consequence will be overlooked that belongs to the consideration of this so little considered, and almost virgin subject.

3. To give you, then, in the first place, the sum of Mr. Boyle’s account; he proposes in general two things: 1. To declare in what sense the distinction is to be understood: 2. To prove that it is not an arbitrary or illusory distinction, but grounded upon the nature of things. As to the first, he tells you that by things *above reason*, he conceives such notions and propositions as mere reason, that is, unassisted by revelation, would never have discovered to us, whether those things be to our finite capacities clearly comprehensible or not. And that, by things *contrary to reason*, he understands such conceptions and propositions as are not only undiscoverable by mere reason, but such as, when we do understand them, do evidently appear repugnant to some principle, or to some conclusion of right reason.

4. Now,

4. Now, before I go any further, I would here, by this great man's leave, and with due deference to his high character, remark, that, though things undiscoverable by mere reason, without revelation, may, in a certain sense, be said to be *above reason*, in as much as they surpass the natural ability of the understanding to make the first discovery of them, yet this is not what divines mean by *above reason*, as they use the phrase in this distinction, opposing it to *contrary to reason*. For, this distinction was intended against the Socinians, who generally reject the mysteries of faith as contrary to sense and reason; to which we reply, that they are not contrary to reason, but only above it. They cry out that this is no distinction, but a mere shift and evasion, pretending that the parts of it fall in together, and that what is above reason is also contrary to it, and therefore not to be believed. Now, it is most plain, that both they that use this distinction, and they against whom it is used, do not mean by things *above reason* such as are beyond the first invention or discovery of it. For, besides that to mean that our mysteries are only undiscoverable when we say they are above reason would be too little a thing to oppose to *contrary to reason*, it is also too little a thing to intend by mystery, since, though the undiscoverableness of them by reason might be a sufficient ground of their being so called before their revelation, it can be none now after they are revealed. And, therefore, if we say of these mysteries now that they are above reason, we cannot be presumed to intend it in respect of their undiscoverableness. And it is as plain, that our adversaries do not so understand us. For they deny that things above reason are to be believed, and that, because (according to them) above reason and contrary to reason are all one. But now no Socinian that understands his own principle would deny the credibility of things above reason, as that signifies only undiscoverable by reason alone; much less would he say that what is above reason (in that sense) is also contrary to it. No; without doubt they will in this sense both allow us the distinction,

distinction, and the mysteries (if they may be so called) that are built upon it. But then this plainly shews that they do not understand it in this sense, any more than we.

5. Instead therefore of saying undiscoverable, he should have said incomprehensible by reason. Into which he slips unawares, in the account of the other part of the distinction, *things contrary to reason*, by saying, that they are such as when we do understand them do appear repugnant &c. which plainly implies that the former things that were said to be above reason, are such as we do not understand, even when discovered, and not such as we are not able only to discover; since otherwise there will be no antithesis in the second part, in which there is nothing amiss except those words, "as are not" "only undiscoverable," which in my judgment ought to be expunged as the production of the first mistake.

6. Mr. Boyle proceeds to illustrate his explanation of this distinction by a comparison drawn from sight. He supposes a man to be asked by a diver what he could see in a deep sea. To which the man is supposed to reply, that he could see into a sea-green liquor, to the depth of some yards, and no further. So that if further asked if he could see what lies at the bottom of the sea, his answer, no doubt, would be in the negative. But then, if the diver should let himself down to the bottom, and bring up thence and shew him oysters or muscles with pearls in them, he would easily acknowledge both that they lay beyond the reach of his sight, and that the pearls were genuine and good. But, if the diver should further pretend that each of these pearls was bigger than the shells they were contained in, this would be thought not only undiscernable by the eyes, but contrary to their informations, and to admit this would argue the sight not only to be imperfect, but false and delusory, and accordingly it is presumed that this he would not admit.

7. Now, I not only allow this comparison, but even admire it for the singular aptness and pertinency of it to illustrate, even to the sense, the difference between things above, and things contrary to reason; only I think it seems



seems to proceed upon the supposition, that by things above reason are meant such only as are incomprehensible by it, which certainly would make the comparison much more apposite and exact. Whereof he himself appears sensible at the end of it, where, offering to consider the matter more distinctly, he tells you that the things above reason are not all of one sort, but may be distinguished into two kinds, sufficiently differing from each other. Which he makes to be these, that there are some things that reason by its own light cannot discover. And others, that, when proposed, it cannot comprehend. This, indeed, is true, but then he should have said so sooner, and have told us withal, that by things above reason (as the phrase is used in this distinction) he meant the latter sort only, the former not being to the purpose.

8. However, he proceeds upon that part first, that is, to shew that there are divers truths in the Christian Religion, that reason, left to itself, would never have been able to find out. Of which he gives several instances, which, as not being to the point, I pass over, and come to his other consideration of things above reason, meaning such as when proposed do surpass our comprehension, and that (as he well observes), upon one or other of these three accounts, either as not clearly conceivable by our understanding, such as the infiniteness of the divine nature, or as inexplicable by us, such as the manner how God can create a rational soul, or how this, being an immaterial substance, can act upon a human body, or be acted upon by it, &c. Or else, lastly, as asymmetrical or unfociable, that is, such, as we see not how to reconcile with other things evidently and confessedly true, whereof he gives an instance in the case of prescience and contingency.

9. He further observes (and I think rightly), that there may be difference of degree in things above reason, as to their abstruseness. That some things appear to surpass our understandings immediately, even before attentively looked into. And other things only when a  
narrow

narrow inspection is made into them, being intelligible enough in the gross, and as employed in common discourse. Whereof he gives instances in place, time, and motion. And he makes use of this observation to solve a difficulty wherein it is pretended that we cannot profess to believe things which we acknowledge to be above our reason, without discovering that we do not well consider what we say, and that we then talk like parrots. To which the substance of his answer is, that we may talk of those things, according to that notion of them which is more obvious and superficial, though not according to that which is philosophical and accurate.

10. After this explanation of what is meant by above reason, and contrary to reason, he comes, in the second place, to justify the distinction by showing that it is grounded upon the nature of things. And that he does, by showing that there is no necessity that things above reason should be also contrary to reason. This he shows, first, of things above reason in the first sense, viz. those that are undiscoverable by reason alone; but this being not the sense of *above reason*, as it is used in this distinction, and since things, according to this sense, above reason are not affirmed by our adversaries to be contrary to it, I pass over all that he says upon this part, and strike in with him again where he shows the same of things above reason in the second sense. I cannot meet with any thing directly under that head, but only a few passages here and there scattered up and down. As when he says of Galileo, that, when he first made his discoveries with the telescope, and said that there were planets that moved about Jupiter, he said something that other astronomers could not discern to be true, but nothing that they could prove to be false. And again, when he says that for a thing to be above reason is extrinsecal and accidental to its being true or false. Because, to be above our reason is not an absolute thing but a respective one, importing a relation to the measure of knowledge that belongs to human understanding.

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standing. And therefore it may not be above reason in reference to a more enlightened intellect &c. which indeed is rightly and very judiciously remarked in itself, and no less pertinently to the present business. And again, when he says that there are some things true which yet are liable to objections not directly answerable, and so above reason. He instances in the controversy of the divisibility of quantity, where each side of the contradiction is pressed with unanswerable objections, and yet, as parts of a contradiction, one of them must necessarily be true. And yet, take which you will, you run into invincible difficulties. Which indeed well concludes that a thing that is above reason may yet be true, and if true then not contrary to reason, it being impossible that what is so should be true. Which one consideration is indeed enough to justify the distinction beyond all exception.

11. Mr. Boyle has yet a further observation concerning this distinction, too considerable to be passed over; and that is, that he looks upon it to be of importance, not only to the defence of some mysteries of the Christian religion, but even of some important articles of natural theology, in which (as he shows by several instances) there are many doctrines which must be acknowledged to be true, and yet whose *modus* is not explainable.

12. After this he considers an objection wherein it is pretended that the granting [*of*] this distinction would be of bad consequence, as affording shelter to any unintelligible stuff that a bold enthusiast may obtrude under the venerable title of a mystery, that is *above reason*. To which he answers very judiciously, that he does not deny but that the distinction is liable to be ill employed, but that this is no other than what is common to it with divers other distinctions, which are without scruple admitted because useful, and not rejected because they have not the privilege that they can never be misapplied. And that therefore, both in reference to those other distinctions, and that he had been treating



ing of, it becomes men to stand upon their guard, and strictly examine how far the doctrine, proposed as a mystery, is entitled to the benefit of this distinction. Which if it should be employed to justify any thing, that, though stiled a mystery, is but a pretended one, the error (as he well observes in the close of all) will lie, not in the groundlessness of the distinction, but in the erroneousness of the application.

13. In this you have the sum and substance, as briefly and as clearly as I could represent it, of Mr. Boyle's thoughts concerning things above reason, and contrary to reason, which, like all his, are great and strong, and (allowing only for those inaccuracies taken notice of) just and true. And now, though what this excellent person *has* [*have*] offered may serve to let *in* [*d*] a great deal of light into the distinction, yet since a thing of such consequence if true, and so much contested whether true or *no* [*not*], can never be made too clear, and sometimes a different though not better representation of a thing may contribute to its further illustration, every reader having his particular point of view so as that the very same notion or truth that does not meet with him in one posture may shine full in his face and strike him with success in another, I shall, therefore, under the shelter of Mr. Boyle's authority, and by the advantage of his light, venture to set down my own thoughts concerning this weighty point, applying myself chiefly to that part of it wherein I think the other account most defective.

14. And, first, though it should be true, that to be above reason, is to be incomprehensible, and to be contrary to reason, is to appear repugnant to some principle or conclusion of right reason, yet I do not think this of itself sufficient either to clear or to justify the distinction, since it may be both again demanded what it is to be incomprehensible, and what repugnant; and again disputed, whether incomprehensible and repugnant be not the same, as well as whether that which is above reason be not also contrary to it. And then we

are but where we were before. This account of the matter is then too gross and general to be rested in, and we must be therefore more minute and particular in our explanation of it, if we would be more clear.

15. However, since generals are to go before, and do also prepare the way for particulars, I shall first propose the general idea of things above reason and contrary to reason, and then particularize upon that idea, by opening and unfolding more distinctly and explicitly what is contained in it, and by so comparing and collating together the two parts of the notion, as to show the real difference that is between them. So that I shall make but one work of the explanatory and justificatory parts, supposing that there needs no more to the justification of the distinction, than only to have the members of it well explained. For, if the idea of above reason be distinct from the idea of contrary to reason (as the explanation of them will show that it is), then the distinction proceeds upon a real difference, is grounded upon the nature of things, and has all that is necessary to a true and good distinction.

16. By things above reason, then (as the expression is used in this distinction), I conceive to be meant, not such as reason of itself cannot discover, but such as when proposed it cannot comprehend. And by things contrary to reason I conceive such as it can and does actually comprehend, and that, to be absolutely impossible. Or, in other words, a thing is then above reason, when we do not comprehend how it can be, and then contrary to reason, when we do positively comprehend that it cannot be. Thus in the general.

17. But, to be a little more particular; we are to consider, upon the first part, that when we speak of things above reason, the word reason here (as was shown in the first chapter) signifies the same as understanding, and there being but one only operation of that, namely perception, by *comprehend* here must be meant the same as by *perceive*. So that when we say of things

things above reason, that they are such as reason cannot comprehend, it is the same as to say they are such as the understanding cannot perceive. But then, when we say *cannot perceive*, it is to be carefully noted, that this is not to be understood of the literal and grammatical meaning of the proposition, as if the thing said to be above reason were perfectly unintelligible, but only of the truth of it, as was observed before concerning faith. And then again, when we say that above reason is when we do not comprehend or perceive the truth of a thing, this must not be meant of not comprehending the truth in its whole latitude and extent; so that as many truths should be said to be above reason as we cannot thus thoroughly comprehend and pursue throughout all their consequences and relations to other truths (for then almost every thing would be above reason), but only of not comprehending the union or connection of those immediate ideas, of which the proposition supposed to be above reason consists. And which is therefore said to be above reason, not because the simple and direct meaning of its terms is unintelligible, or because the truth of it is not comprehensible in its remotest and utmost extent, but purely because the connection of its ideas, or the manner of it, is not discernible; and that, partly for want of sufficient clearness of the ideas themselves, so as to be able to perceive their union intuitively, and partly for want of a due and proper medium whereby to compare them, so as to discern their union in the way of science and demonstration.

18. It is also to be observed, upon the second part of the explanation, that I chuse rather to say that things contrary to reason are such as we perceive to be impossible, than such as appear contrary to some principle or some conclusion of right reason. This being the more general and absolute idea, whereof the two other are but instances and specifications. For then is a thing said to be impossible, when its ideas cannot stand together or be united; which may be either because of the immediate opposition and inconsistency of the ideas themselves with themselves, so as mutually to exclude each other



(as in a contradiction), or because of their inconsistency with some other truth, with which *it* [*they*] cannot comport. Or, in other words, either because one of the ideas cannot consist with the other, by reason of the immediate opposition that is between them, or because the union of both is inconsistent with some truth or other, which therefore will not suffer them to be united. Which truth will be, indeed, either a principle or a conclusion of right Reason. And then we are said to perceive a thing to be impossible, when we perceive that its ideas cannot stand together, and that, either immediately by the very inconsistency of the ideas themselves, or mediately by the repugnance that they carry to some other truth, whether principle or conclusion. Which repugnance I take to consist in this, that the supposed principle or conclusion cannot stand with the union of such ideas, and that therefore, if such a principle or such a conclusion be true (as is supposed), then such ideas are not united, and indeed are as incapable of union, that is as impossible, as if there were an immediate inconsistency between the ideas themselves. So that for a thing to be *contrary to Reason* is, in short, for the understanding to perceive the absolute impossibility of it, or that its ideas cannot stand together, which it does either immediately by perceiving the direct inconsistency of those ideas, or mediately by perceiving their inconsistency with some evident and incontestible truth or other, whether principle or conclusion. For the way and method *is* [*are*] the same in knowing a thing to be false or impossible, as in knowing it to be true; and, accordingly, as the process of the understanding is either immediate or mediate in the latter, so is it also in the former. But though there *are* [*be*] these different ways of perceiving the impossibility of a thing, it is in the general perception of its impossibility, and not in the several ways of it, that its contrariety to Reason must be made formally to consist; even as it was shewn before of knowledge, which is made to consist in the perception of the relation of ideas, and not in this or that determinate manner of perceiving it, which  
indeed

indeed serve afterwards to distinguish knowledge into its kinds (as suppose intuitive and demonstrative), but do not enter into its first and general idea. For which consideration, I think the perception of a thing's impossibility does better express its contrariety to Reason, than the repugnance it appears to have to some principle or conclusion of it; that being only (as I said before) an instance and specification (and but one single one too) of its impossibility.

19. So, now we are arrived to a clear and distinct conception of things above Reason, and things contrary to Reason. A thing is then above Reason, when we do not perceive or comprehend how it can be. And then, contrary to Reason, when we do perceive that it cannot be, or is impossible. As, to give a plain and sensible instance of each of these: that the sides of an hyperbola should be always approaching to each other, and yet never meet, though continued to infinity, is a proposition of unquestioned certainty in geometry; and yet such as passes the reason of a man to comprehend how it can be, and therefore may properly be said to be one of those things that are above Reason. But now, that a triangle should have parallel sides, is not only above Reason, but directly contrary to it. For, here, the understanding is not only at a loss to comprehend how it may be, but does positively and evidently perceive that it cannot be; it being utterly impossible that a figure of three lines should have its sides parallel to each other.

20. Now, though by this explanation of things above Reason, and contrary to Reason, the difference between them *is* [be] already obvious even to the eye, and stares a man in the very face, like things of great inequality whose disproportion appears at view without measuring them; yet, for further satisfaction's sake, and to make the matter as plain as any thing in nature, to all but those who either have not, or will not use their understandings, let us a little compare these ideas together, thereby the better to illustrate their difference.

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21. It is most evident, that the idea of things above Reason, and the idea of things contrary to Reason, are two really distinct ideas, and that one is not the other. This immediately appears from the very direct view of the ideas themselves. For what can be more plain, than that *not to comprehend how a thing may be*, and *to comprehend that it cannot be*, are two different things? And what better way have we to know the distinction of things, but only that the idea of one is not the idea of another? But, then, besides, the ideas of these things are not only formally different from each other, but have also different properties and characters belonging to them, and such too as are exclusive of each other; and which therefore do manifestly shew the ideas to which they belong to be distinct. For, for a thing to be above Reason, implies only a negation, the not comprehending how a thing can be; but, for a thing to be contrary to Reason, implies the position of an intellectual act, the comprehending that it cannot be. Again, in things above Reason, the proposition is supposed not to be understood; whereas, in things contrary to Reason, it is supposed to be well understood, and that, to be false and impossible. Again, in things above Reason, the mind determines nothing concerning the object proposed, whether it be true, or whether it be false, whether it be possible, or whether it be impossible. All that she determines is concerning her own act, that she does not comprehend how it can be. But whether it be or not, that she does not affirm, but holds herself in a perfect suspense. But now, in things contrary to Reason, the mind is every whit as positive and decisive; and does determine as boldly and freely, as in those things that are most according to it. Whereby it plainly appears, that to be contrary to Reason, is something more than to be above it, and that the mind proceeds a great deal further in the former than in the latter; the language of the soul in things above Reason being only, "How can these things be!" But in things contrary to Reason, she is positive and dogmatical, roundly pronouncing, "This cannot be." So that unless there be no difference between a negation and a positive



sitive act, between the ignorance or non-perception of a thing, and the knowing [*of*] it to be false, between suspension and a peremptory determination, between a greater and a less, it is most undeniably evident that the parts of this distinction are not only really but widely different, and that to be above Reason is one thing, and to be contrary to Reason is another.

22. If it be pretended (as some, perhaps, may be likely to object), that to be contrary to Reason implies a negation, as well as to be above Reason; because it is there supposed to be comprehended that the thing is false and cannot be, and that therefore they agree in one of the main instances of their difference: to this the answer is clear and full. I grant there is a negation in one as well as the other, but then I distinguish of negation. There is a negation of the act, and a negation of the object. *Contrary to Reason* does indeed imply a negation of the object; that is, it implies a separation and disunion of certain ideas, as inconsistent and incompatible one with another. But it does not imply a negation of the act, but the quite contrary; because the understanding is here supposed positively to comprehend the thing, and withal the impossibility of it, which is not done in things above Reason, wherein the negation is that of the act. So that this first and great difference between them stands firm and good.

23. And now, having thus far justified the reality of this distinction of things above Reason, and contrary to Reason, both by the explanation and collation of the parts of it, which thereby appear to consist of ideas as different as can well be conceived, I might further proceed to do the same by producing some instances of things confessedly above Reason, that are also notwithstanding as confessedly true. For if any one thing that is above Reason be yet found to be true, this plainly demonstrates the thing in question (if there can be yet any question about it); most evidently showing, that what is above Reason is not, as such, contrary to Reason, it being impossible that what is contrary to Reason should be true, what-  
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ever *is* [*be*] contrary to Reason being also as contrary to Truth. I might also further allege, that to be above Reason, does equally abstract from true and false (which *contrary to Reason* does not), and that, not only because, as I observed before, it determines nothing concerning its object, but also because it is a thing not of an absolute, but of a relative importance, as being an extrin-sical denomination. taken not from the nature of the object as it is in itself, but only as it is to us, and in relation to our not only finite, but very limited capacities. For to be above Reason, is not to be above Reason in general, or all Reason, so as to be absolutely incomprehensible, but only Human Reason. But then that which is above the reason of a Man, may not be above the reason of an Angel (as indeed what is above the Reason of one man may not transcend that of another); and what is above the reason of an angel may yet be perfectly comprehended by God, the Supreme and Sovereign Reason. So that to be above Reason here is of a respective signification, such as does not express the quality of the object as it is in its own nature, but only as it is in reference to such a particular faculty, whereas to be contrary to Reason, is not a relative but an absolute thing; and whatever *is* [*be*] contrary to Reason, is contrary to all Reason, and so consequently to Truth. I say, I might further insist on these, and some other considerations, but being partly prevented here by Mr. Boyle (whose account I would have used to supply the defects of mine, as mine is intended to supply some of his), and having so abundantly cleared the difference of these things already, I shall not so far distrust either the strength of the argument, or that of my reader's understanding, as to prosecute this matter any further than only to shape an answer, out of what has been laid down, to an objection which I meet with in a modern writer against Monsieur Jurieu, and which, to do it the utmost justice, I will set down in his own words.

“ I have

24. "I have considered," says he, \* "the distinction which they use between being contrary to Reason, and being above Reason. It is agreed, that it is not possible to believe what is contrary to Reason. But it is said that we can well believe what is above Reason. This distinction seems to me of no use, or else I do not comprehend it. For if, by being above Reason, it be meant, that we do not comprehend a truth in its whole extent, though what we conceive of it be clear and certain, I own that in this sense one ought to believe what is above Reason. But if, by being above Reason, be meant a doctrine, wherein we see nothing clear, a doctrine which our reason loses the sight of on all its sides; I mean, that all the propositions which may be extracted from it appear incomprehensible; such a one as this, for example, that the three Divine Persons make but one God &c. it seems, that to be above Reason in this sense, is the same as to be entirely inaccessible to Reason, which differs nothing, but in words, from being contrary to Reason."

25. I suppose, whoever *has* [*have*] duly considered and well comprehended the tenor of the foregoing discourse, can neither be insensible of the deficiency of this allegation, nor be long at a loss what answer to return to it. But, to spare my reader this trouble, my reply is, that this author's argument proceeds upon a wrong supposition. He supposes here, that to be above Reason, must be either the not comprehending [*of*] a thing in its whole latitude and extent, or the comprehending [*of*] nothing at all of it. Whereas I have shewn before that it is neither of them; that we do not mean by above Reason what is all over unintelligible, even as to the very meaning of the proposition, nor what is not to be comprehended in its utmost extent, but only what is incomprehensible to us as to the truth of the thing, or the manner of it. It is true, indeed, if the proposition were

\* *Avis sur le Tableau du Socinianisme. Traité 1. page 14.*  
perfectly



perfectly unintelligible, so that (as he says) "we could see nothing clear in it," even as to the very sense and meaning of it, we could no more believe it than what is contrary to Reason, though even then it would not (as this author confusely enough pretends) be the same with it; because what is contrary to Reason is supposed to be well understood. But it is much otherwise, if it be incomprehensible only as to the truth or manner of the thing. This, as I shall shew hereafter, may very well be believed, though what is contrary to Reason cannot; and what is utterly unintelligible cannot. And I have sufficiently shewn already, that what is thus only inaccessible to Reason, differs, a little more than in words, from being contrary to it.

26. And now, if human nature were not a very unaccountable thing, I should stand greatly amazed at either the natural or wilful blindness of those who are for confounding things so vastly different as the parts of this distinction of things above Reason, and contrary to it, most apparently are. There are, indeed, some things which we are ordinarily taught to distinguish, and yet, when strictly examined and compared, [*they*] will be found to have no real ground of distinction in them. And it is every whit as great (and almost as common) a fault to distinguish things that do not differ, as to confound those that do. And there are also other things of such near resemblance and cognation to each other, that there needs a great deal of art, subtilty, and nice inspection, to discern their difference. So fine and minute and almost imperceptible are the lines that terminate their natures, and divide them from one another. But the ideas of these things are as different as those of a man and a tree, a triangle and a square; so that a man must wink hard not to perceive it, or be very insincere not to acknowledge it. And I cannot imagine why those especially who are known to serve themselves upon occasion of distinctions, which have no other foundation than the mere will and pleasure (unless you will say interest) of those that use them, should yet reject such a solid and well-grounded,

grounded, as well as well-authorized, one as this, but only because it is not for their turn, and, if admitted, would, like a bomb thrown into their garrison, blow up and lay waste their main strength, and force them to desert and give up a cause, which they are (now especially) most zealously fond of, and [*which they*] seem resolved, even against reason, to maintain.

27. For I must further remark (and it is an observation not lightly to be passed over) that, if this one distinction of things above reason, and things contrary to reason, be once admitted, or shewn to be real, solid and well-grounded, the main part of the Socinian controversy is immediately, or at least in the very next consequence, at an end. For, the reason why they will not believe things above reason, is because (as they pretend) *above reason* differs nothing in reality from *contrary to reason*, and so those things that are above reason are also as much contrary to it as above it, and what is contrary to reason is on both sides acknowledged impossible to be believed. Well, but then if it be made appear (as I think by this time is sufficiently done), that these two are quite different things, and that to be above reason is not the same as to be contrary to it, then, even by their own confession, there can be no pretence why what is above reason may not be believed. Which I take to be the true inducement that makes these men stand out so fiercely and obstinately against this distinction (for they are aware what mischief it will do them), as it is also the reason why I have bestowed so much care and pains to clear and justify it.

28. And thus having given an account of these great and fundamental things, what reason is, what faith is, and what it is to be above, and what contrary to reason, we have now prepared the way to the more full and direct consideration of the belief of things above reason; the true state of which question, by what has been hitherto discoursed, appears to be this, whether we may not assent upon the authority of divine revelation to such things as our understanding or reason cannot perceive or

comprehend, as to the truth or manner of them; or, whether our not being able thus to comprehend them, be a sufficient reason why we should not believe them? For the resolution of which we have already laid the grounds, and shall now proceed more directly to build upon them in the following chapter.

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#### C H A P. IV.

*That Human Reason is not the Measure of Truth.*

1. **W**E have gained a most wonderful point in the foregoing chapter, by proving the distinction between things above and things contrary to reason, and such as of itself alone is sufficient, not only immediately to decide, but even for ever to silence the controversy between us and our Socinian adversaries, concerning the belief of things above reason. For the only objection that is or can possibly be pretended against the belief of things above reason being the supposed contrariety of the same things to reason, if it be shewn that to be above reason involves no such contrariety, then the objection against the belief of such things is fairly and wholly removed, and consequently there remains no reason why they may not be believed. So that I cannot but look upon the substance of my work as most effectually done already, and those of our adversaries, that have any reasonable measure of penetration and sincerity, must needs be sensible of it. And I dare appeal even to their own consciences whether they *are* [*be*] not. However, considering the importunity of those I have to deal with, as well as the weight of the cause itself, I shall endeavour  
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the further establishment of it upon some other considerations, whereby I shall also give further confirmation, and so repay what I am indebted to the point contended for in the preceding chapter ; since we may as well argue backwards from the believableness of things above reason to their not-contrariety, as forwards from their not-contrariety to their believableness, the consequence being full as good, thus, “ Above reason believable, therefore not contrary ;” as thus, “ Above reason not contrary, therefore believable.” Now, in order to the fuller conviction and demonstration of the Believableness of things above reason, I set out upon this ground, that “ Human Reason is not the Measure of Truth.”

2. It is agreed, among the masters of reason, that, as all proof ought to be only of such things as need it, so there are propositions so clear and evident of themselves, that they have no need of being demonstrated ; and that there are some again that are not capable of demonstration, the fulness and immediateness of their evidence rendering them strictly indemonstrable. And it has been charged by one \* of the most considerable of them as a fault in the method of the Geometricians, that they set themselves to prove things that have no need of proof, whereof he gives an instance in Euclid, who goes formally to work to prove that two sides of a triangle taken together are greater than one, although this be most evident even from the notion only of a right line, which is the shortest that can possibly be between two points, and the natural measure of distance from one point to another, which it could not be, if it were not also the shortest of all lines that can be drawn from point to point.

3. Now, though I cannot say that the proposition of this chapter is so evident of itself as not to be capable of demonstration, yet, I must confess, I cannot but think it of the number of those that do not need any ; that is, I mean, to those who will but take the pains to consider it with attention, and are withal so sincere as to say inge-

\* *L'Art de Penser*, p. 432.

nuously what they inwardly think. For, to unattentive or captious persons, nothing is plain (since there is nothing but what some will contradict, and there are those who profess to doubt of every thing); and even the sun itself cannot make a man see, if either he want eyes, or will shut them. I cannot, therefore, say, that, to such men, either this, or any other proposition, is plain; but I would venture to be tried, by any competent and indifferent considerer, whether this be not indeed a very plain and certain proposition, as plain as most of those which pass for principles and maxims in discourse, that "Human Reason is not the Measure of Truth." And, accordingly, I should justly fear incurring the same censure that is charged upon the geometricians, of going to prove what is evident, were there not something peculiar in the present case that makes it very different from theirs. For they, dealing in matters of an abstract and indifferent nature, and such wherein the lusts and passions of men are altogether uninterested, have no real need to prove evident things, because, for that very reason, their evidence is never contested; whereas, the point, I have now in hand, being of a moral concernment, and such as encounters the partialities and false biases of human nature, particularly that great and governing one of self-love, though it should be of equal evidence with some of their maxims, will yet not be equally secure from opposition, and pass alike uncontested. And so there may be need of proving it, if not to do any necessary service to the proposition itself, yet to satisfy the importunity of the men I argue with. Which, indeed, is the present case, since (as was intimated in the beginning) the sentiment of these men concerning the disbelief of things above reason resolves at last into this principle, that Human Reason is the Measure of Truth. Which, therefore, both for their satisfaction and refutation, must be shewn to be false.

4. Now, when I say that human reason is not the measure of truth, my meaning is, that it is not that  
common

common standard whereby truth in the general is to be measured; so that of every thing it may be safely concluded that it is either true or not true, according as it *accords* [*accord*] with this measure, as it *is* [*be*] comprehensible or not comprehensible by human reason. It is true, indeed, there is a certain sense in which human reason sometimes is, and may be truly said to be the measure of truth, in as much as whatever the understanding *does* [*do*] clearly and distinctly perceive, may be concluded as most certainly true, it being impossible that a thing should be otherwise than as we clearly perceive it to be, without supposing our perceptive faculties to be in themselves naturally false, and without supposing it also necessary that we should fall into error even in the right use of these faculties (it being impossible to conceive a more right use of them than to assent only to what we clearly perceive); which are not only in themselves manifest absurdities, but such also as would necessarily infer the author of our natures to be also the author of our errors and deceptions. It must, therefore, be admitted by all, what the philosophers of the Cartesian way so earnestly stand and contend for, that clearness of perception is the great rule and criterion of truth, so far that whatever we do clearly and distinctly perceive to be true is really in itself true. But, then, this is only to be a partial and inadequate rule, and in some certain limited respect only, not absolutely and in general. For, though I grant that whatever we clearly perceive is true, yet I deny that it follows likewise backwards, that whatever *is* [*be*] true we do also clearly perceive, and so, consequently, that whatever we do not clearly perceive is therefore not true. By which it is plain, that this Cartesian maxim must be very much abused, to prove that human reason is the common and general measure of truth; and I dare say the great authors of it never intended it to that purpose.

5. Reason or understanding in general may be safely said, and must necessarily be allowed, to be the measure of



truth. For truth in general carries a necessary relation to understanding in general, as fully adequate and commensurate to it. So that all truth is simply and absolutely intelligible, the greatest and sublimest truths as much as the least and meanest; those which the Angels study and desire to look into, as much as those which employ the narrow thoughts of the poorest rustic. The former are in themselves as intelligible as the latter, and, if not actually so well understood, it is not because of any incapacity in the objects, but by reason of the disproportion of the faculties that are conversant about them. But this disproportion must not be universal, nor extend throughout the whole order of being. For what is intelligible must be so to some understanding (since what no understanding can comprehend is the same as not to be intelligible); and, consequently, there must be an understanding that comprehends all that is truly intelligible, that is, all truth. And, accordingly, it may be truly said of this all-comprehensive understanding, that it is the measure of truth; so that whatever this perfect understanding *does* [*do*] not understand, is not intelligible, and, if not intelligible, then also not true. Besides that it might be further considered (were this a proper place for so abstract and metaphysical a speculation), that truth itself, as to the real nature and essence of it, is one and the same with the divine ideas, as they are related to one another, and does, therefore, exist originally and intirely in the mind of God, who is substantial truth, and accordingly does comprehend all truth, and so consequently is the measure of it. And, because this all-comprehensive understanding is contained within the extent of reason or understanding in general, therefore, it may be truly said also of reason or understanding in general, that it is the measure of truth, it being most certain, that what is above all reason, or what no reason whatsoever can comprehend, is as much above truth too, and cannot possibly be true.

6. But, though it be thus necessary to allow this of reason in general, the same cannot be allowed of human reason.

son. For, whatever *is* [*be*] the measure of truth, must be fully adequate and commensurate to truth. That is certain. And therefore, if human reason be the measure of truth, it must have the same compass and extent with truth, and possess it whole and intire, if not essentially and substantially, as God does, yet at least noetically, and by way of theory, so as to be able thoroughly to perceive and comprehend all truth. But, now, that this qualification cannot possibly agree to human reason (though it be somewhat unreasonable that I should be put to prove such a proposition as this) I hope fully to demonstrate, upon a double consideration, one taken from the nature of human reason, and the other from the nature of truth.

7. And, first, to begin with truth. This, as the most thinking and metaphysical persons conceive of it, is supposed to consist in the relations of equality or inequality, or agreement or disagreement. Now we are to consider, that these relations may be of three sorts, either such as are between created beings, or such as are between intelligible ideas, or such as are between created beings and their ideas. And we are also to consider, that there are two general sorts of truths extremely different one from another, and therefore carefully to be distinguished: those that regard only the abstract natures of things, and their immutable essences, independently on their actual existence; and others, again, that do regard things that do actually exist. The former of these constitute that order of truths, which we call necessary; the latter, that which we call contingent. And this double order of truths results from that threefold relation before-mentioned. From the first and third relations arise contingent truths, which are nothing else but the relations of agreement or disagreement that are either between created beings themselves, or between created beings and their ideas. And these I call contingent truths, in opposition to those that are necessary and eternal, partly because these relations could not begin to exist before those beings were produced (it being impossible

possible that there should be relations between things that are not), and partly because these relations might not have existed, because those beings might not have been produced. And, as contingent truths arise from the first and third, so from the second and middle relations result those truths which are necessary, eternal and immutable, and which I understand to be nothing else but the relations of agreement or disagreement that are between ideas.

8. I go here upon the common and allowed distinction between necessary and contingent truths, and upon the as-much-allowed supposition that there is such an order of truths as are necessary and eternal; which therefore I take for granted as a principle, not to decline the trouble of proving it, but because it is a confessed as well as evident thing, and I care not for proving any more evident things than I needs must. And that these necessary and eternal truths are in this precisely distinguished from those that are contingent, "that they are the relations that are between ideas," I think is plain from the very notion and nature of them, because they are supposed to be such truths as regard the abstract natures and essences of things as they are in idea, and not as they have an actual existence *in rerum naturâ*, since then they would not be necessary, but contingent truths, which would be contrary to the supposition. And because these necessary truths are the most considerable and principal sort of truths, as being the ground and foundation of all science, and the true and proper objects of our theory and contemplation; and because, for the same reason, whenever we speak of truth absolutely and in general, we are presumed to mean necessary and immutable truth; hence it is that truth is commonly said, by metaphysical writers, to consist in the relations that are between ideas; though, indeed, this be strictly true only of necessary truth. But it is sufficient to the present purpose that it is true of this. And so much, I suppose, will readily be granted me at least, that the general nature and reason of necessary and eternal truths consists in the relations that are between ideas.



9. I further add, that these ideas must be the same with the divine ideas. It is true, indeed, that, exactly speaking, all ideas are divine ideas, even those which we use to call our own, it being most certain (as might easily and with the greatest evidence be shewn) that the immediate objects of our understandings are no other than the ideas of the divine intellect, in which we see and contemplate all things. But, not to enter into this sublime speculation at present, it will be sufficient to consider, that, unless the ideas, whose relations constitute those truths which are necessary and eternal, be the divine ideas, it will be impossible that necessary and eternal truths should be what we suppose they are, that is, necessary and eternal. For necessary and eternal truths must be necessary and eternal relations; and, it being impossible that relations should be more necessary or eternal than the subjects from which they result, unless these ideas, the subjects of these relations, be necessary and eternal, how can their relations be so? It is plain, therefore, that these ideas must be necessary and eternal. But now, I pray, what ideas are so but the divine? What is there in the whole compass of being that is necessary, eternal and immutable, but God and his divine perfections? As, therefore, we say that these necessary and eternal truths are relations between ideas, and not such as are between either created entities themselves, or between them and their ideas, because then they would be of the order of contingent, not of necessary truths; for the same reason we must say that they are the relations that are between the divine ideas, those only being sufficiently steady and permanent subjects to sustain such stable and immutable relations. And, indeed, were it not for those representative perfections of the divine nature which we call ideas, there would be no necessary and eternal essences to support these necessary and eternal relations, and then there could be no such relations; and if no such relations, then there could be no necessary truths; and if no necessary truths, then no science. Which, by the way, would most convincingly prove, to any capable and attentive

attentive understanding, the absolute necessity and certainty of a God, as the *most* [d] inmost ground and central support of the whole intellectual world.

10. Well, then, it can no longer be doubted but that these necessary and eternal truths are the relations that are between the divine ideas. But now, *as* [since] these ideas are infinite, as being the essential perfections of God and really identified with his divine nature and substance, so it must necessarily follow, that the relations, *that* [which] result from them and subsist between them, must also be infinite. And then, since these truths do essentially consist in, and in their reason and formality are no other than these ideal relations, it no less evidently follows that truth also must be infinite too.

11. Which also will be necessary to conclude upon another account. For I consider, again, that, since relations do not in reality differ as distinct entities from their subjects and terms (as the relations of two circles supposed to be equal to each other do not really differ from the circles themselves so related), these ideal relations must, in the reality of the thing, be one and the same with the divine ideas themselves, and consequently with the divine nature with which these ideas are identified. And, accordingly, truth, which is the same with these ideal relations, must also, as to the real essence and substance of it, be one and the same with the divine nature.

12. And that, indeed, it is so may be further, and somewhat more directly, demonstrated thus. That God is the cause of whatever *is* [be] besides himself, or, whatever *is* [be], is either God or the effect of God, is a clear and acknowledged principle. Necessary truth, then, is either God or the effect of God. But it is not the effect of God, and therefore it can be no other than God himself. Now, that it is not the effect of God, the many gross absurdities, which that supposition draws after it, I think will oblige him that considers them to acknowledge. For, first, if necessary truth be the effect of God, either it would not be necessary, which is against the supposition;

position ; or, if it be, then, as being a necessary effect, it must have a necessary cause, that is, a cause necessarily determined to act, and so God would be a necessary agent, even *ad extra*. He would also be an unintelligent agent. The consequence is not to be avoided. For, if truth be the effect of God, then, antecedently to the effecting of it, there was no truth, and consequently no knowledge, because there could be nothing known ; and so God, in the production of truth (if indeed he did produce it), must be supposed to act altogether in the dark and without any intelligence. Again, if truth be the effect of God, then the perfection of the divine understanding must be supposed to depend upon something that is not God, nay, upon something created by God ; whereas God is the true perfective object of all his creatures, and is himself completely happy in the sole contemplation of himself. It will follow again, that God has constituted an order of realities which he has not power to abolish ; that he has made some things which he cannot unmake again. And, lastly (to add no more), if truth be the effect of God, then it cannot be God, because God cannot produce what is himself ; and if it be not God, then, by the supposition, there will be something necessary, immutable, eternal and independent, &c. that is not God. Which last consequence, as it contradicts the common and natural sentiment of mankind, so it struck so hard against a certain very thoughtful and metaphysical head\*, that he could not forbear urging this as one argument against the very being of necessary truth ; because, then (as he pretends), there would be something necessary besides God ; not considering that this necessary truth is really one and the same with the divine substance. Which one consideration puts by the whole force of his argument against the being of necessary truth, though, however, it be sufficiently conclusive of the point we now contend for, that this truth is not the effect of God. For, if it were, then his allegation would take place ;

\* Cogit. Rational. de Deo, p. 296.



that is, there would indeed be something necessary besides God, which though it *does* [*do*] not follow from the supposition of the being of necessary truth, is yet plainly inseparable from the other supposition, that of its being the effect of God. For then the very next consequence is, that there would be something necessary besides God, which no religious, *nor* [*or*], indeed, rational ear can bear. It is plain, therefore, that truth is not the effect of God; and, since it is not, it remains, by virtue of the premised disjunction, that it can be no other than the very substance and essence of the Deity.

13. And to this purpose I further consider, that the whole perfection of the mind does consist in its union with God, who is her only true good. This seems to me a proposition of a very shining evidence. For the good of the mind must of necessity be something spiritual; otherwise it would be of a nature inferior to herself, and so not capable of being her perfection. But neither is that enough. Whatever *is* [*be*] the good of the mind, must not be only of a like nature with the mind, that is, of a spiritual, but of a superior nature too. It must be something above the mind that can be its perfection, and that can act upon it, and enlighten it, and affect it with pleasing sensations; otherwise how can it be able to add any thing to its better being or perfection? And, in order to all this, it must also be intimately present to it, and united with it; otherwise how can it so act upon it? But now God is the only spiritual being whom we can possibly conceive thus qualified to be the good or perfective object of our minds. Whence it follows that he only is so, and that we cannot become either more perfect or more happy in any kind or degree but by our union with and possession of God. And hence it further follows, that truth could not be any perfection of our understandings, if it were not the same with the divine essence (since that is our only perfective and beatifying object); and that, therefore, since it really is perfective of our understandings, and that in the very highest measure (the understanding being then most perfect when it has the

clearest

clearest and the largest view of truth), it can be no other than the very essence of that infinite mind who is the only true good and objective perfection of all spirits.

14. It is true, indeed, Des Cartes makes all truth, even that which is eternal, to have been positively instituted and established by God; to depend upon him as the summus legislator; to be the effect of his will and pleasure; and, by consequence, to be absolutely and originally arbitrary and contingent. So that, according to him, 2 and 2 might not have been 4, or 3 angles of a triangle might not have been equal to 2 right ones, if God had pleased so to order it. But this notion of this great man does so rudely shock the natural sense of mankind, that it cannot find admission even where the rest of his philosophy does, but is generally exploded, notwithstanding the eminency of its author; and that, even by one of his greatest admirers\*, and (as I think) by far the most considerable of his disciples. And truly I think this opinion is treated no worse than it deserves, since, besides the absurdities already mentioned, it shakes the foundations of science, yea and of morality too, by supposing the natures, not only of metaphysical and mathematical truth, but even of moral good and evil, to be of a positive and arbitrary, and consequently of a contingent ordination. It is therefore deservedly as well as generally rejected; but then let those that reject it have a care that they fall not into a worse absurdity. As they would not suppose truth to be of a positive and alterable nature, and that the relations of ideas might have been otherwise than they are, so let them have a care how they make any thing necessary and immutable that is not God. Let them be consistent with themselves, and as they justly reject the opinion that makes truth the effect of God's free and arbitrary constitution, and consequently of a mutable and variable nature, so let them own and confess (as they are obliged to do) that it is no other than God himself. For there is no other way of avoiding Des

\* Mr. Malebranche.

Cartes's absurdity. For if truth be not God, then it is the effect of God; and if the effect of God, then since the constitutions of God are free and arbitrary, the natures and relations of things might have been quite otherwise than they are, the whole science of geometry might be transposed, a circle might have the properties of a square and a square the properties of a circle, 2 and 2 might not have been 4, or what else you will instance in. And, so in morality too (which is of far worse consequence), there might have been the like transposition, what is virtue might have been vice, and what is vice might have been virtue. These are the natural consequences of truth's being the effect of divine constitution, and they are intolerable ones too, and therefore the principle from which they flow is by the general current of writers well denied. But then, unless they proceed, and acknowledge truth to be one with the divine essence, they cannot help relapsing into the same or worse absurdities. For whoever *says* [*say*] that truth is not God, must say that it is the effect of God, and whoever *says* [*say*] that, must either say that it is arbitrary and contingent, or, if he *says* [*say*] it is necessary and immutable, he must allow of something necessary and immutable that is not God. But now, it being most evident that there is nothing necessary that is not God, if truth be not God, then it is plain that it cannot be necessary (which presently runs us into the Cartesian absurdity of the arbitrary position of truth); or if it be necessary, then it is as plain that it must be God. The short is, truth is either God, or the effect of God. If it be not God, then it is the effect of God, as Des Cartes says; but if not the effect of God (as the consequent absurdities from that principle demonstrate, and as is generally granted), then it is God himself, as we say. It must be one or the other, there is no medium. To say that truth is God, or to say that it is the effect of God, are each of them consistent propositions, though from the gross absurdities of the latter the former only *appears* [*appear*] to be the right; but to deny that it is the effect of God, and yet not to say that it is God,



God, that is, to affirm that it is neither the effect of God, *nor* [or] yet God, is all over unmaintainable and inconsistent. If it be not the effect of God (as is both generally and justly acknowledged), then it must of necessity be God, since, whatever *is* [be], is either God or the effect of God.

15. And, indeed, if truth be not God, how comes it to be clothed with the glorious ensigns of his Majesty, to wear the characters of his divinity, and to have so many of his peculiar and incommunicable attributes? How comes it to be necessary, immutable, eternal, self-existent, increated, immense, omnipresent and independent? And that, not only upon the conceptions of any minds, whether human or angelical, but even all things whatsoever, which might never have been made, or might now be annihilated, without any prejudice to the being of truth, which does not respect the natural and actual existencies, but only the abstract essences of things. For, were there no such thing as any real circle or triangle in nature, it would still be nevertheless true that their abstract essences would be determinate and invariable, and that such and such distinct properties would belong to them. Which, by the way, plainly convinces that truth is none of the effects, works or creatures of God, since it did exist before them, does not now depend on them, and would remain the self-same immutable thing without them. But then I demand, whence has it this self-subsistence and independency of being? Whence again has it its fixed and unalterable nature, such as we can neither add any thing to, *nor* [or] diminish aught from? How is it that it is present in all places, and to all minds, so as to be contemplated by them all at the same time, and after the same manner? How comes it to pass, that we cannot so much as dis-imagine it, or by way of fiction and supposition remove it out of being; but it still returns upon us with a strong and invincible spring, since even the very supposition that there is no truth carries a formal proposition in it, whose ideas have a certain habitude to each other, and so contradicts it-

self? Besides, how comes it to be a perfection of the divine understanding? Is any thing a perfection to God but himself? How comes it also to be the rule and measure of his will, which can be determined by nothing but what is just, reasonable and true? Can any thing be a rule to God that is not himself? Does he consult or follow any thing but what is one with his own divine nature and essence? And yet God consults and follows truth, and cannot act but according to its immutable laws and measures. It is not, therefore, really distinguished from him, but coeternal and consubstantial with him; and so in consulting truth he consults his own essence \*, even the divine *λογος*, the eternal and increated wisdom, the true intelligible light, in whom are all the ideas and essences of things, the fulness of being and truth, who in the beginning was with God and was God, who is eternally contemplated by him with infinite joy and complacency, and who said of himself incarnate, "I am the way, the truth and the life." I would fain know how all these incommunicable attributes of God should agree to truth, if it be any thing less than a divine nature. Particularly I demand, whence has it that unshakeable firmness and stability, that invincible permanency and steadfastness, that necessity of existence, that utter repugnance to not being, but only because it is really coessential and consubstantial with him whose name is Jehovah, and who is being itself, to whom it is essential to exist, or, rather, whose very essence is existence?

16. But now, from this coessentiality and consubstantiality of truth with the divine nature (a noble and sublime theory, but which I do but lightly touch over, having not room here to pursue it at large), it evidently and necessarily follows again that truth is infinite. There cannot be a more immediate, *nor* [or] a more necessary, *nor* [or] a more inseparable connection between any two things

\* *Veritas immortalis est, veritas incommutabilis est, veritas illud verbum est de quo dicitur in principio erat verbum, & verbum erat apud Deum, & Deus erat verbum.* S. Austin in Psal. 123.

than between this consequence and that principle. And indeed if truth were not infinite, how can the knowledge of God be so? Not, sure, as concretely and objectively considered, for that manifestly implies the infinity of its object. And what is the object of the divine, or of any other understanding, but truth? And, should knowledge here be taken for the power or faculty of knowing, to what purpose is an infinite power of knowing, unless there be an infinite to be known? And would not such a power be uneasy and afflictive, as well as useless, to him that had it, unless the object be supposed to carry a due proportion to it? For if it be so uneasy a reflection to some of us to have such short and narrow faculties when the compass of truth has so large and spacious an extent, to be able to know so little when there is so much to be known, how much more troublesome and painful would it be to the supreme intelligence to have an infinite understanding when all that is intelligible is but finite? Would not that infinity of his capacity serve to vex and disquiet him more than the narrowness of ours does us? The difference being as much as between having a great stomach and but little meat, and a little stomach when there is a great deal of meat, whereof which is the *greatest* [greater] punishment is obvious to imagine. And we may judge of this in some measure by ourselves. We have in us a capacity boundless and unlimited. For, though our understandings be finite, our wills know no measure, and are in a manner infinite. As God has made us capable of enjoying an infinite good, so nothing less than that can satisfy our desires. For we desire good as good, and consequently all possible good. Now we find this to be a great pain to us at present to desire an infinite good when all that we can enjoy here is finite. The greatest part of the uneasiness, the melancholy, the disconsolateness, the aridity that accompanies human life, will be found, if traced to the original, to proceed *from* [d] hence, viz. from the little proportion that is between our capacities and our gratifications, between what is desired and what is enjoyed.



And this desire of an infinite good will be a far greater punishment to us hereafter, when the activity of our faculties shall be more invigorated and enlarged, if we have not then an infinite good to enjoy. It will be at least the worst ingredient of hell and damnation, if not all that is to be understood by it [*them*]. And yet we are still to consider, that our will is infinite only "ex parte objecti," because it desires an infinite good, and not "ex parte actus," because it desires it infinitely, or with an unlimited force and activity. For it is impossible that a finite nature should have any power or force in it that is strictly infinite, or that any such act or operation should proceed from it. But then what would the affliction be, if the act were infinite as well as the object, and we were to aspire after an infinite good with an infinite desire! What conception can frame a just idea of the misery of such a state! And can it be much less for an infinite intelligence to have only a finite intelligible for its object? But there is nothing painful or afflictive in the condition of the supremely and completely blessed. And, therefore, we must conclude; that, as the infinite will of God has a good, fully commensurate and adequate to its unlimited activity, whereon it may center and repose its weight, so the infinite understanding of God has also an infinite intelligible for its object. And, since the formal object of understanding in general, and consequently of the divine, is truth (as that of the will is good), hence it follows again, that truth must needs be of an infinite nature.

17. And do we not find it so when we convert ourselves to it by study and meditation? When we apply our minds to the contemplation of truth, and set ourselves to muse and think, do we not find that we launch forth into a vast intelligible sea, that has neither bottom nor [*or*] shore? And the more we think and the more we meditate, are we not still more and more convinced of this, and do we not discover, the further we go in our intellectual progress, that there still lies more and more beyond us, so that the more we advance in the knowledge

ledge of truth, the more we enlarge our idea of it; as the greatest travellers think most magnificently of the world? Do we not find, as in a spacious campaign, so in the immense field of truth, that our eye wearies, and our sight loses itself, in the boundless prospect; and that, besides the clear view which we have of a few things at a little distance from us, there lie all round us vast tracts unmeasurably diffused, whereof we have only confuse and indistinct images, like the faint blue of the far distant hills? Are not the relations and combinations of things with one another infinite, and, should but one link in this endless chain be altered, would not innumerable alterations ensue upon it? Should but one proposition that is false be supposed true, or one that is true be supposed false, what understanding but the divine could go on with the train of new consequences that would result from such a supposition? I say new consequences; for we are to consider, that, besides the absolute system of truth, which contains the relations of ideas, with their settled coherencies and dependencies one upon another, according as they really stand in their natural order, there is a secondary system of truth, which I may call hypothetical, that results from any supposed change made in the absolute system, whence will still arise new and new consequences even to infinity. But, not to consider hypothetical truth, can the bounds of that which is absolute be ever fixed, or its stock ever exhausted? Does it not, after all the study that has been employed about it, and the numberless number of volumes that have been written upon it, furnish perpetual matter for our contemplation, and is it not a subject for everlasting thoughts and considerations? Has it not been the great research of the thoughtful and inquisitive for many ages, and yet does not every age refine upon its predecessor, and produce new discoveries? Are not the sciences continually improved, and yet are there not still depths in every science which no line of thought can ever fathom? What a vast fecundity is there in some plain simple propositions? Nay, who can number the conclusions that may be drawn  
from

from any one principle? Take the most simple figure in geometry, and where is the mathematician who, after a thousand years' study, can reckon up all the properties that may be affirmed of it, both as absolutely considered, and as it stands in relation to other figures? And what then shall we think of the whole science in all its branches and dependencies, particularly of algebra, the main ocean of this bottomless sea? And what shall we say of metaphysics, another unmeasurable abyss? And what of the endless circle of truth, if not the same which one of Job's friends says of God (Job 11. 7.)? "Canst thou by searching find out truth, canst thou find her out unto perfection? It is as high as Heaven, what canst thou do? Deeper than hell, what canst thou know? The measure thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea." And that, because they, after all, are finite; whereas this is truly and strictly infinite. Which, by the way, sufficiently proves a God, and that this God is truth; whose eternal and glorious majesty be blessed for ever!

18. But then let us consider, if truth be indeed (as you see) of an infinite nature, then, to prove that human reason is not fully adequate to it, does not entirely possess it, *nor* [or] all over and wholly comprehend it, and consequently cannot be the measure of it, there will be no need of laying open the great weakness and deficiency of our understanding: I need not represent the imperfection of its light, *nor* [or] the shortness of its views, *nor* [or] the slenderness of its attainments, *nor* [or] the very narrow extent of its knowledge, *nor* [or] the very little progress it is able to make in the contemplation and comprehension of truth; that there are a great many things whereof we have no ideas (for which we need go no further for an instance than our own souls), and that even where we have ideas of things we cannot always discern the relations and connections that are between them; and that, either for want of sufficient clearness in the ideas themselves to have their relations perceived immediately without comparing them with other immediate ideas, or else for want



want of such due and proper mediums wherewith to compare them ; and that therefore the extent of our knowledge is not only vastly exceeded by the natures of things, but also, very considerably, even by our own ideas, there being many things whereof we have ideas, and sometimes very clear ones too, and yet which we know no more how to reason upon or discourse of intelligibly or with any certainty, than we do of those things whereof we have no ideas at all ; being, for example, no more able to tell what proportion such a circle bears to such a square, though we have clear ideas of both, than we are to tell what proportion there is between angels and our own souls, things whereof we have no ideas : a very remarkable instance of the shortness and contractedness of our understandings, which, it seems, are not only destitute of the ideas of many things, and consequently of the knowledge of them (it being impossible that the extent of our knowledge should exceed that of our ideas), but are also blind to those very ideas which they have, and cannot see, even when they have the advantage of the light. But I say, I need not present my reader with a night-piece of human reason, describe its great blindness and gross darkness, how ignorant she is when she does not adventure to judge, and how erroneous when she does, stumbling and falling (as is usual in the dark) out of one mistake into another, out of one error into another, either by embracing false principles or by drawing wrong conclusions from true ones, so that ignorance seems her safest retreat, and to suspend, her best wisdom : these, I say, and such other of our intellectual infirmities, I need not insist upon, or make any advantage of, it being sufficient to conclude the point in hand, that human reason, in its largest capacity and extent, and with all the advantages of both nature and artificial improvement, is, after all, but a finite thing (and that, to be sure, the most zealous of its votaries and advocates must confess that it is) ; since it is impossible that what has bounds should be able totally and adequately

quately to comprehend what has none, or that finite should be the measure of infinite.

19. I know but of one thing that can with any pertinency be replied to this argument, and that is, that though human reason (as finite) be not able to comprehend all truth (as being infinite), yet, however, there may perhaps be no one truth in particular but what, when presented to it, may be comprehended by it, and so human reason may be rightly said to be adequate and commensurate to truth, as distributively, though not as collectively considered. But to this I have several things to return. First of all, I say, that such is the reciprocal dependence and concatenation of truth, that the want of a thorough and entire comprehension of all truth, in its widest and most diffused extent, must needs very much eclipse the view and darken the perception of any one solitary truth in particular; so that, however we may have some tolerable perception of it, and such as we may call clear in comparison of some other truths which we do not see so clearly, yet it cannot be near so clear and distinct a perception, as that infinite Being has of it, who sees not only the truth itself, but also the manifold relation, connection and combination, that it has with all other truths: the difference between these two ways of perception being of a like nature with that which is between seeing a proposition as it stands singly by itself, and seeing the same proposition with all its relations and dependencies, and in conjunction with the whole context and coherence of the discourse whereof it is a part. I say again, secondly, that though we may have a competent perception of some plain and simple truths, without pursuing them through all the relations and dependencies that they have with other truths (since, otherwise, as I have hinted already, we should be able to understand nothing, and every thing would be above reason); yet, however, we do not know but that there may be some truths of such a nature as not to be understood without the adequate comprehension of those relations and dependencies; which since we have not, we do not, nor can

can ever know but that there may be some truths that are so above us as to be out of our reach, and to lie beyond all possibility of comprehension, and consequently that human reason is not adequate and commensurate to truth even distributively considered: I say we do not know, and it is impossible we should ever know, but that thus it may be. For how should we be able to know it, or upon what shall we ground this our knowledge? It must be either upon the natural force and penetration of our understandings, or upon our actual views and perceptions, or upon the nature of truth itself. As for the capacity of our understandings, though we do not know the precise and exact bounds and limits of it, yet we know in the general that it is finite, and has its fixed and determinate measure, which it would strive in vain to exceed. As for the nature of truth; that we both experiment, and, from the foregoing considerations, must of necessity conclude, to be infinite. And what ground of assurance can we have from either or both of these, which are apt rather to lay a foundation of diffidence and distrust? And then, as for our actual views and perceptions, though we should suppose them to have been hitherto *never* [ever] so clear and distinct, *never* [ever] so numerous and extensive, and *never* [ever] so fortunate and successful, so that our victorious understandings never yet met with a baffle, *nor* [or] founded a retreat from a too difficult and impregnable theory; suppose, in one word, that we never yet applied our minds to the consideration of any one truth but what we fully comprehended and were perfect masters of (which yet he must be a very presumptuous, or a very little-experienced thinker that shall affirm of himself); how, notwithstanding, do we know, considering the finiteness of our intellect and the infiniteness of truth, but that there may be other truths of a nature so far above us, and so disproportionate to us, as not possibly to be comprehended by us. For we cannot argue here from the past successes and achievements of our understandings to the future; or, because there has been nothing hitherto proposed



to us but what we comprehended, that therefore there can be nothing proposed but what we can comprehend. If we conclude thus, we forget the vast disproportion between truth and human reason, that the one is finite and the other infinite; the due and attentive consideration of which would convince us, that though we have thought *never* [ever] so much, and *never* [ever] so well, and comprehended *never* [ever] so many truths, yet, for aught we know, there may be truths which our intellectual sight, though aided with all the advantages of art that may help the mind as much as a telescope does the eye, can yet never penetrate, and which (by the way) it may be worthy of God to reveal to us, if it were only to check and control the daring progress of our understanding, to make us understand our measure and remember that we are but men, to be sensible of the defects of that part upon which we most value ourselves and despise others, and that even the light that is in us is but darkness. Whether there be any such truths I do not now say, but only that, upon the supposition of the infinity of truth, it is impossible for us to be sure but that there may be such; which is enough to hinder our reason from being (at least as to us) the measure of truth; since, if it be so, it is more than we know, or can possibly be assured of, which makes it all one (to us) as if it were not. For we cannot make use of it as a measure, or draw any consequence from it to the falsehood, impossibility or incredibility of things incomprehensible since, for aught we know, or can know, to the contrary, there may be truths which we cannot comprehend.

20. But then I say further, thirdly, that the infinite nature of truth will oblige us to acknowledge that there actually are, and must be such. For, if truth be infinite, then it is plain that we cannot comprehend it in its full and entire extent; and so much the very objection supposes. But then I say, that, as the want of a perfect comprehension of all truth does very much shade and darken the perception of any one single truth in particular,

cular ; and that, because of the mutual connection and dependence of things one upon another (as was before observed) ; so it must needs quite eclipse, and totally abscond some truths from our view. For there are some truths so very complex and abstruse, and that lie so deep and, as I may say, so far within the bowels of the intellectual system, that include such a multitude of relations, depend upon so many suppositions, are the conclusions of so many premises, pre-suppose and require the knowledge of so many things (of some of which, it may be, we have not so much as the simple ideas), have such a train of principles planted and intrenched as a guard before them, and draw such an immense retinue of consequences after them, and are every way so mingled, involved and combined with other truths, that they cannot possibly be understood without an intire and all-comprehensive view of the whole rational system. Instances of such truths abound in every science. But there is nothing that may furnish us with so sensible and palpable an illustration of this matter, as the order and measure of Divine Providence. We are all fully assured, from the very notion and idea of God, as involving all possible excellency and perfection in it, that he is a being infinitely wise, good, just and holy ; and, consequently, that his whole conduct in the government of the world must, necessarily, carry the character of all these attributes ; and that he cannot possibly do any thing contrary or repugnant to any of them, any more than he can deny himself, or depart from the essential perfections of his infinite nature. And upon this consideration is founded the best argument we have for submission and resignation to the will of God, and acquiescence in his providential dispensations. Thus far, then, we are all satisfied and agreed. And yet it cannot be denied, when we come to particulars, but that there are phenomena in the moral as well as in the natural world, which are utterly insoluble, and that a great many of these dispensations of Providence are accompanied with desperate and invincible

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difficulties, such as have, at once, exercised and puzzled the thoughts of the most inquisitive in all ages, and still remain obstinate and unmoveable objections, not only to the atheists and libertines, but even to the most sober and intelligent of both philosophers and divines, men of the greatest light and piety, those who best understand, and do most reverence and adore the ways of God. And adore them, after all, they must; for so intricate and intangling are the difficulties, or (by the leave of some), I would say, mysteries of Providence, especially in those dark scenes of it that relate to the divine concurrence and co-operation with the will of man, the ordination of his final state, the order and distribution of grace, the permission, direction and nice conduct of sin, &c. that the capacity of our understanding will not serve us to give a clear and unobnoxious account of them. Indeed, the diligent and curious wit of man has gone a great way in this as well as in other matters, and several systems and hypotheses have been invented about these things by contemplative spirits, among whom the two very particular authors of the *Treatise of Nature and Grace*, and of *L'Oeconomie Divine*, have, I think, gone the furthest of any. But though some of these accounts bid fairer for reception than others, by striking some glimmering light into these abstrusities, yet still they all agree in this, that they leave a great deal more in the dark, and labour with difficulties, even where they do explain: so that, after all, they discover nothing so much as their own shortness and deficiency. In the mean while, we know, and are most certain in the general, that all is right, and as it should be, in the conduct of God towards his creatures, and that he cannot make one false step in the government of the world. So much we understand without systems, and truly not much more with them. For, as for the particular scenes of Providence, we know not what to make of them; and, when we have considered the dispensations of God as much as we can or dare, we find ourselves, after all, obliged to confess, that  
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though "righteousness and judgment *are* [*be*] the habitation of his seat, yet clouds and darkness are round about him." Psalm 97. 2.

21. But now how comes it to be so dark and cloudy? How come we to be so little able to see the particular wisdom, goodness, justice and holiness of those ways of God, which, in the general, we are convinced to be so wise, good, just and holy? Why can we not enter into the detail of Providence? Why? Even because we do not see it throughout, and have not a comprehension of its universal system. For the passages of Providence are of such a relative and complicated nature; there is such a kind of *μεταχυσίσις* or mutual in-being or in-dwelling in them (if I may transfer an expression hither, commonly applied to a higher mystery), they are so interwoven with, and have so common a dependance upon one another, that, without a comprehensive view of the whole drama, we can hardly make any thing of any one particular scene. Indeed, if we could have such a view as that, a view that went round and through, and grasped the whole area of that immense circle, we should quickly see the regularity of the most uneven and odd-shaped parts, and how wonderfully they conspired (like the flats and sharps of music) to the order and harmony of that excellent and surprising beauty that results from them. But, being not able to reach this, we are not competent judges of the rest (which, by the way, should repress our forwardness to sit in judgment upon things so far above the cognizance of our court); and though we know the measures of God to be all wise, good, just and holy, yet this is only an implicit knowledge, founded upon an external evidence only (much after the same manner as it is in faith), even the general conception we have of the divine perfection, without any clear and immediate discernment of the internal connection that is between the things themselves. We believe it is all well and right, because the infinitely wise God sits at the helm; but then again, because he is so infinitely wise, we cannot sound the

depths of his wisdom (as indeed it would be very strange if an infinitely wise agent should not be able to do things wisely, and, yet, beyond our understanding), *nor* [*or*] reconcile all his particular proceedings to the laws of reason and equity ; but the more we study about these things, the more we are at a loss, the further we wade into this sea, the deeper we find it, till at last we find ourselves obliged to cry out with the most inspired Apostle, “ O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God ! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out ! ” Rom. 11. 33. And all for want of an intire and comprehensive view of them. For, if the knowledge of some very compounded truths be impossible, without the clear perception of the simple principles upon which they depend ; and a man would to no purpose beat his brains about the consideration of conical sections, till he *has* [*have*] first well-possessed himself of ordinary geometry ; how much less, then, (may we conclude), are the intricate and very complicated events of Divine Providence to be unravelled without a collected and simultaneous idea of the universal system whereof they are parts, to which they relate, and from their concentricity with which they receive all their order and beauty, but which is in a manner lost to us for want of compass enough in our prospect ! By which single instance it appears (among many others that might have been given) how the incapacity of comprehending truth in its whole extent may disable us from comprehending many particular truths ; and, consequently, that the same infinity of truth which hinders us from comprehending it according to that extent, must also hinder us as much from being able to comprehend every particular truth. So, then, there will be particular truths which are incomprehensible by us : and consequently human reason is not commensurate to all truth, not only as collectively, but even as distributively considered ; and, therefore, not as distributively, because not as collectively.

22. But,

22. But, then, to raise our speculation a little higher, I consider yet further, that the infinity of truth is not only an infinity of extent, but also an infinity of nature; that is, that the compass of truth is not only boundless and illimited, and that it has in it an inexhaustible spring, which, like the source of light, is never to be drawn dry by the most thirsty draught of the whole intellectual world, but also that there are particular truths of a nature truly infinite, and by consequence incomprehensible to any understanding that is not so. For we are here to recollect, what has been already shewn, that truth is consubstantial and co-essential with God and with the divine ideas. Now, though these ideas are [be] all equally of the essence and nature of God and so far equally divine (it being impossible that there should be any thing in God that is not God), yet there is this general and very remarkable difference between them, that some of these divine ideas are absolute, and some relative. That is, some are of the essence of God simply and absolutely as he is in himself, without any relation to any thing out of himself; and others, again, are of the essence of God considered purely in relation to things without him, either in act or in possibility, and only so far forth as the divine essence is representative of creatures. Or, if you will, thus: we may consider a two-fold being in ideas, “*esse reale*, and *esse ideale*, or *repræsentativum*.” Some ideas are divine, not only according to their *esse reale* (for so they are all), but also according to their *esse repræsentativum*, as representing God to the mind that contemplates them. Others, again, are divine only according to their *esse reale*, being indeed of the substance of God, but not representing him but his creatures, and so are divine in the same sense as the idea of a body is spiritual, viz. essentially only, not representatively. Which diversity indeed resolves into the former, because they are of the essence of God, not as it is absolutely in itself, but only as it is representative of creatures, according to such a certain modality and limitation of perfection. And, accordingly, though they are [be]



truly divine ideas as well as the other, yet they are not said to be ideas of God, as not representing him, but his creatures. The short is, the essence of God may be considered either as it is absolutely in itself, according to its infinite simplicity, or as it is in relation to, and representative of things without, either of an actual or of a possible existence. And so the ideas of essential perfections of God are of two sorts : either such as are of the essence of God considered in the first sense, as it is in itself, or *else* [*d*] such as are of the same divine essence only in the second sense, as far forth as that essence is representative of things out of itself ; upon which, by the way, I suppose, must be grounded (if we will resolve things into their last principle), the common distinction of the attributes of God into communicable and incommunicable : the incommunicable attributes of God being those perfections that are of the divine essence, simply and absolutely considered as it is in itself ; and the communicable, those that belong to the divine essence, relatively considered, and as representative of creatures, to whom accordingly they are in their measure truly applicable ; whereas, the former are not, but are peculiar to God alone, which sufficiently shews the difference between this double order of divine ideas. But, to make it yet more intelligible by an instance. The idea of the divine immensity, or that perfection in God which we call his immensity, is of the essence of God according to the first sense, as it is simply and absolutely in itself ; being no other than the substance of God as it is universally diffused, intirely present in, and filling all places, without being circumscribed by any, yet without any local extension. But, now, the idea of extension, or that perfection in God which virtually, eminently and *modo intelligibili* answers to extension (and is therefore frequently called by M. Malebranch *L' étendue intelligible*), is of the substance of God not as it is in itself simply and absolutely, but only as far forth as it is representative of matter or body, and imitable or participable by it, according to those limitations and imperfections which belong to that kind of being, and which  
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are represented by this its idea. I know not whether I express myself to the conception of every reader, but I am sufficiently clear and intelligible to myself; and whoever *is* [*be*] not much wanting either in metaphysics, or in attention, cannot I think well miss my meaning.

23. Now the use that I make of this speculation to the present purpose is this: those ideas which are of the essence of God, only as that divine essence, according to some certain limitations and inadequate considerations of it, is representative of creatures, must be considered by us as of a finite nature. Because, however truly divine and of the essence of God, yet not as it is absolutely and simply in itself, but only as it is in relation to creatures; that is, as partially and inadequately considered, according to certain abstractions and limitations of entity and perfection, such as the things, whereof they are ideas, do require. And, accordingly, such ideas are ordinarily said, not to be the ideas of God, who is infinite, for they do not represent *him* (though essential to him), but to be the ideas of creatures, who are finite. They are indeed divine ideas, because essential to God; but they are not ideas of God, because they are of the divine essence only, as it relates to creatures, and is representative of them. Of creatures, therefore, they are the ideas, and God in seeing them is not properly said to see himself (though they *are* [*be*] of himself), but to see creatures; because, though they *are* [*be*] of his divine essence, yet it is only according to such precisions, limitations and inadequations of it, as to be expressive and representative of their finite perfections. As, therefore, the realities which these ideas represent are finite, so these ideas must be conceived by us as finite too; it being impossible that infinite, considered as infinite, should be representative of what is finite. And as these ideas are finite, so are they also by consequence so proportionate, and of a measure so adjusted to finite understandings, as to be intelligible by them, and within the possibility of their comprehension; which must also in like manner be concluded of all those truths which are

consubstantial to them. And, accordingly, the experiment answers the theory. We find that not only contingent truths that regard only the actualities and existences of things, such as matters of fact, human events, &c. but even a great many of those which are ideal and necessary, and concern only the abstract reasons and essences of things independently on their actual existence, are comprehensible by us; as in metaphysics and geometry, in the contemplation of which sciences we meet with a great many things which we well understand, and whereof we have clear ideas and conceptions.

24. But now it is not thus with the ideas of the first order, *nor* [*or*] with their truths, though those divine ideas, which appertain to the essence of God only as representative of creatures, be both finite and comprehensible by limited understandings (which indeed otherwise would not be capable of any science), yet these absolute ideas which I now speak of, are neither finite *nor* [*or*] comprehensible. For these ideas are of the very essence *and substance* [*d*] of God, as it is in itself purely and separately considered according to its simple and absolute nature, and not as it is in relation to creatures, or as representative of any reality out of itself. And, accordingly, God, in contemplating these ideas of his, may be truly and strictly said to contemplate himself: and we also, in the contemplation of them, do as really contemplate God; and that because they are of his divine essence simply and absolutely considered as it is in itself, and not as it is in reference to any thing besides or out of itself. These ideas, therefore, are strictly infinite (because the divine essence, as it is in itself simply and absolutely considered is so), and consequently incomprehensible by any finite, and consequently by human understanding. God only can comprehend these ideas, and that, because he only can comprehend himself. Human Reason, indeed, has light enough to discover that there are such ideas and perfections in God, and is withal able to discern enough of them to raise her greatest wonder and devotion, and to make her despise all other intelligible objects in comparison of these infinite grandeurs; and the angelic spirits



spirits that wait about the Throne of his Majesty, and stand in a better light, are able to see yet more of them ; but neither the one *nor* [*or*] the other can comprehend them fully, any more than they can God himself, and that because they are God. So that though the other ideas *are* [*be*] finite and comprehensible, these are truly infinite and incomprehensible. And of this we have sufficient evidence in the instances above proposed of each. The idea of extension is very clear and intelligible to our minds, as finite and as narrowly bounded as they are. We have a very distinct view of it, we perceive it, we comprehend it. Among all intelligible objects, there is none that is more clear, nor whereof we have a more adequate and exact notion. And upon this is founded all that peculiar clearness, evidence and certainty that is in the geometric sciences, which alone have the happiness to be free from disputes, and without contestation to find that truth which the others seek after ; and that, for no other reason but because we have so clear and distinct a notion of its general subject, extension. But now as to the \* divine immensity, so far are we from having a clear conception of that, that no sooner do we set ourselves to contemplate this vast idea, but we enter into clouds and darkness, or rather into such an over-shining and insupportable light as dazzles and blinds our eyes, yea, hurts and pains them, till they can no longer endure to gaze, but are forced to refresh themselves either by letting down their wearied lids (suspense of thought), or by turning their view upon less glorious objects. In the meditation *of* [*on*] the other idea, we are like men that wade in a river where we both see and feel the bottom, and go on, for a pretty way together, smoothly, and without much difficulty, only now and then meeting

\* I the rather instance in the divine immensity, because the devout Psalmist does herein particularize his ignorance, making it the subject of his astonishment, rather than his curiosity. " Such knowledge is too wonderful for me ; it is high, I cannot attain unto it," Psal. 139.

with an intangling weed, that lets and incumbers our progress. But, in the contemplation of the infinite idea of the divine immensity, we are like men that commit themselves to the main sea, at the very first plunge out of our depth, and ready to be overwhelmed, swallowed up, and lost in an abyfs that knows no bottom.

25. I use a little figure and imagery here, the better to impress this upon the imagination of those who are not so well habituated to the conception of things by pure intellection; but, the thing itself needs none of the advantages of the metaphorical way, being strictly and severely true. And by these two instances, it may appear, what a vast difference there is between these two sorts of the divine ideas, the absolute and the relative, those that are of the essence of God as in himself, and those that are of the same divine essence as it is in relation to creatures. The first, infinite and incomprehensible; the second, finite and comprehensible. For, you see here the idea of extension is clear and distinct, and such as we can fully and adequately conceive; but the idea of the divine immensity has nothing clear and distinct in it, but is all over darkness and obscurity, and such as quite astonishes and confounds us with a thousand difficulties, upon the first application of our thoughts to it; as indeed do all the absolute attributes and perfections of God, which are all equally infinite, and equally incomprehensible to finite spirits, however they may be able to comprehend that, which in the essence of God, is representative of, and carries a relation to those realities, which either actually do or possibly may exist out of it. And in this I say no more (setting aside only the *rational* of the thing), than those who tell us, that the incommunicable attributes of God are infinite and incomprehensible. They are so. But, what is it that makes them infinite and incomprehensible? Even the same that makes them incommunicable, viz. their being of the essence of God, as it is in itself, according to its absolute simplicity, and not as it is in relation to creatures.

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For it is most evident, that the essence of God, as it is simply and absolutely in itself, is every way infinite and incomprehensible; and, therefore, all those ideas and perfections of his, which are, in this absolute sense, essential to him, must be also of an alike infinite and incomprehensible nature. Which, by the way, may serve to silence the presumptuous cavils of those who draw objections against the existence of God from the incomprehensibility of his attributes; since, if there be a God, he must have incomprehensible attributes, which unless we ascribe to him, we do not think either rightly or worthily of him.

26. But, to resume our point. We see, then, here, what a large field is now opened to our prospect of infinite and incomprehensible truths, even of a compass as large as the absolute ideas and perfections of the divine essence. For, though all created things *are* [*be*] of a finite nature, and though even the divine ideas that represent them, as far as representative of them, must fall under the same limited consideration; yet, those absolute ideas and perfections of God, that have no such external reference, but are of the divine essence, as it is in its pure, simple, abstracted self, must necessarily partake of the divine infinity, and be as unbounded as God himself. And since truth (as was before observed) is co-essential and consubstantial with the divine ideas, I further conclude, that though those truths, which regard the actualities and existences of things, or, if you please, things that do actually exist, be finite, because the things themselves are so; and though even those that regard the divine ideas themselves *are* [*be*] also finite, supposing the ideas to be of the inferior order, such as are of the divine essence only, as it is representative of, and in relation to creatures; yet those truths, which respect those divine ideas of the superior order, that are of the absolute essence of God, as it is in itself purely and simply considered, and so are not only essentially but even representatively divine, as truly representing God, and being in a strict and proper sense his ideas: I say, the truths of  
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this order and character must necessarily be of a nature far exalted above all creatures, yea, above all other ideal truths, even as far as what is of the simple and absolute essence of God transcends that which in the same essence is only relative to things without, and can, therefore, be no less than infinite. We have, here, then, an order of infinite truths, even all those which regard the absolute ideas and perfections of God. These divine ideas and perfections are as infinite, as that glorious essence, whose ideas they are, and whom they represent; and so also are the sublime truths which result from them. They are of a nature strictly infinite, and, if infinite, then by consequence incomprehensible; I mean to all understandings that are not so. For, as nothing finite has reality enough to represent infinite, so neither can any thing finite have capacity enough to comprehend it. For, as the actual knowledge of any intelligent being can never exceed its intellectual power, so neither can its power exceed the measure of its essence. A finite being, therefore, must have a finite understanding, and a finite understanding must have a finite perception. Since, then, our understandings are finite, it is plain that our perception of infinite must also be finite. It is true, indeed, that objective reality, which we contemplate when we think upon infinite, has no limits, and so we may be said in some respect to have an infinite thought, as far as the operation of the mind may be denominated from the quality of the object; but yet still we think according to the measure of our nature, and our perception of infinite can be no more at the most than finite. But, now, a finite perception bears no proportion to an infinite intelligible; besides that to perceive such an object after a finite manner is not to perceive it as it is, but only partially and inadequately. But, now, a partial and inadequate perception of a thing can never be said to be a comprehension of that thing, even though the thing be finite; much less, then, when it is infinite. Whereby, it plainly appears, that, if there be an order of infinite truths, the same will also be incomprehensible ones; and  
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since, again, as I have shewn, there is an order of such truths, even all those that regard the absolute ideas and perfections of the divine essence, it clearly follows that there is an order of incomprehensible truths, and consequently that Human Reason is not the Measure of Truth, even distributively considered, since there are particular truths which it cannot comprehend; which was the thing to be proved.

27. And of all this we may have a plain and visible illustration in the forementioned instance of the divine immensity. This is an idea or perfection of God that is truly infinite, as being of his divine essence, as it is absolutely in itself, and not as in order to, or representative of creatures; and as infinite, it is also incomprehensible by any but God himself. Accordingly, the complex truth that regards this absolute idea of God is also infinite, and, as such, incomprehensible: as appears in this proposition, "God is immense," which is an infinite and incomprehensible truth. We find it is so *a posteriori*, by casting the view of our understandings upon it. And we find it must be so *a priori*, by reasoning upon the principles already laid down and established. And to prevent all vain cavilling in this matter, I further add, that though we could suppose the truths that result from infinite ideas not to be infinite (which yet we cannot, by reason of their real identity and co-essentiality with those ideas); yet, however, they must, upon another account, be incomprehensible, even upon the incomprehensibility of those ideas. For, if the ideas whereof a Truth consists be incomprehensible, as they must be if they are [*be*] infinite, that alone would be enough to hinder us from being able to comprehend such a truth, it being impossible we should thoroughly understand the relations or habitudes between those ideas, whose simple natures (the foundation of those habitudes) we do not comprehend. For, if in finite things, the not having [*of*] a clear and adequate idea of a thing makes [*make*] us unable to judge of the truth or falshood of many propositions con-

cerning that thing (whereof there *are* [*is*] a multitude of instances in morality, especially in questions relating to the soul of man, which must for ever lie undetermined, merely for want of our having a clear idea of that noble essence), much more, then, in things infinite will the not having [*of*] a comprehension of the ideas incapacitate us from comprehending the truths that result from them, which will therefore be as incomprehensible as if they were (what indeed they are) in themselves infinite.

28. I have hitherto shewn the incomprehensibility of Truth by Human Reason, and consequently that Human Reason is not the Measure of Truth, from the joint consideration of each. Only with this difference. I have considered and represented truth absolutely as it is in itself, according to its own infinite and unmeasurable nature. But as for Human Reason, I have considered that only as finite, as supposing that sufficient to my present purpose, and that there was no need of placing it in any other light. For, after it hath been shewn that Truth is infinite, to prove that Human Reason cannot be the Measure of it, it is certainly enough to consider it as a bounded power, without representing how very strait and narrow its bounds are; since whatever *is* [*be*] finite can never measure infinite. But then if so, what if we add the other consideration to it? If the bare finiteness of human understanding (a defect common to it with all created intelligences) *renders* [*render*] it incapable of comprehending truth, and consequently of being the measure of it; how much more then *does* [*do*] the littleness and narrowness of its bounds contribute to heighten that incapacity? If the having [*of*] any limits does so unqualify it for the adequate comprehension of Truth, how then does the having [*of*] so very short and strait ones? Strait, indeed, by natural and original constitution, but much more yet retrenched by sin, and by all those passions, prejudices, deordinate affections and evil customs, which are the effects and consequences of sin, and which have now so darkened our minds, and drawn such

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a gross film over our intellectual sight, that we can hardly distinguish day from night, clearness from obscurity, truth from falsehood; and are able to see but so very little a way into the works of God (much less into the Nature of God himself), that we need nothing else to depress and humble our pride and vanity, than that very knowledge of ours which puffs us up: so very narrow in its compass and extent, so very shallow and superficial in its depth, so very confuse and obscure in its light, so very uncertain and conjectural in its ground, and so every way defective and imperfect is it. But how, then, can we sound the depth of truth with so short a line? a bottomless depth with (I will not say a finite, but) so very scanty a measure? And what an extravagant folly and weakness, not to say pride and vanity, is it to fancy that we can? It would be a vain presumption in an angel, but sure the very madness and distraction of impudence in man, who may, with less defiance to sense and reason, think to grasp the ocean within the hollow of his hand, than to comprehend and measure truth, infinite, boundless truth, not only with finite, but *o* [*such*] very limited capacities.

29. But suppose truth were not (what we have shewn it to be) infinite, but had bounds as well as our reason; yet, unless it had the same, our reason cannot be commensurate to it, or the measure of it. But does the supposition of its having limits infer that it has the same? No: for, though finite, its bounds may possibly be extended further than those of our understandings; and how can we be sure that they are not? We cannot, then, even upon this supposition, be sure that our Reason is the Measure of Truth, and, therefore, it is all one, as to us (as I said before), as if it were not so; forasmuch as we cannot use it as a measure, by drawing any consequences from it concerning the falsehood or impossibility of things, upon the account of our inability to comprehend them; since, for ought we know, the limits of truth, though we should suppose it finite, may yet exceed, and that

very greatly too, those of our rational faculties. And, considering both the natural and the superaccessory defects of them, it is very reasonable to think that they do.

30. Some essences, perhaps, therē may be (though even this again *is* [*be*] more than we know), that sit so high in the intellectual form as to be able to comprehend all that is finite; so that the only reason why they have not an adequate comprehension of truth at large is, because it is indeed infinite. But there is no necessity, *nor* [*or*] so much as probability, that human reason should be of so raised an order that nothing but infinity should transcend its comprehension. And it must be a strange composition of pride and self-love that can make us fancy that it is; something like that, only much more extravagant, which possesses the disturbed heads of some in Bedlam, and makes them conceit themselves kings and emperors, in the midst of their irons, rags and straw. What, though truth were finite, and some understandings too that are so were able to measure it, why must this needs be concluded of human understanding? If a finite being were able to comprehend truth, why must man be that being? The scripture tells us, he is made lower than the angels, and how many orders and degrees there may be among them, we know not; *nor* [*or*], indeed, how many ranks of spiritual beings there may be in the universe whose understandings go beyond ours. For who can define the out-flowings of the divine fecundity, or number the rounds of the intellectual scale? In the mean while, though man *knows* [*know*] not how many orders of intelligent creatures there are above him, yet it is with great reason and consent presumed, that there are none below him; so that he is placed, even by his own confession, in the lowest form of the intellectual order. And why then may not his understanding (as much as he values himself upon it) be of so shallow a depth, and so low a size, that even finite objects may be disproportionate to him? Especially since we find him so often puzzled and gravelled in

in natural things, as also in those ideal truths that have relation to the natural and ectypal world, such as philosophical and mathematical problems. Or, if the Reason of any creature could be the Measure of Truth, why should he be that creature, who is seated in the very confines of the material and immaterial world, and is, as it were, the common point where matter ends and spirit begins; who brings up the rear of the intellectual kind, and is both the youngest and the least-endowed among the sons of God?

31. These considerations sufficiently shew that there is no necessity, *nor* [*or*] so much as probability, that Human Reason should be the Measure of Truth, even upon the supposition of its being finite. Which indeed is enough, of itself, to carry the point contended for as far, as the design of the present argument is concerned. For, if it be not necessary that Human Reason should be the measure of Truth, then it is possible that it may not be, and if it *is* [*be*] possible that it may not, then we can be never sure that it is, and if we cannot be sure that it is, then we cannot use it as a measure, which (as I have remarked already, and, for the moment of it, do here reiterate) makes it the same to all intents and purposes as if it were not such at all. But yet to carry our plea a little higher; I further contend, that, as the foregoing considerations suffice to shew that Human Reason may not, so there is one behind that very positively demonstrates that it cannot be the Measure of Truth, even though we should allow it to be of a finite and bounded nature, as well as our own understandings.

32. As there are many things whereof our ideas are very confuse and obscure, so it is most certain that there are some things whereof we have no ideas at all; it having not pleased the eternal and infinite intelligence to exhibit that in himself, which is representative of those things to our understandings. But, now, besides the difficulties and disadvantages we shall always lie under in the comprehension of things, from the confuseness and obscurity of



our ideas, which of itself will many times render those things, and also whatever nearly *relates* [*relate*] to those things incomprehensible by us ; and besides that our not having any ideas of certain things is an invincible bar to all knowledge and comprehension of those things (unless we could be supposed to be able to see without light); it is also further considerable that possibly the knowledge of that truth, which we set ourselves to comprehend, and whereof we have the ideas, may depend upon the truth of another thing whereof we have no idea. If it should be so, though truth in general be *never* [*ever*] so finite, or the particular truth we would contemplate be *never* [*ever*] so finite, it is plain we shall be no more able to comprehend it than if it were infinite. Now, I say, that it is not only possible that this may be the case (which yet of itself, as I have again and again noted, is sufficient to debar us from using our Reason as the Measure of Truth), but there are also some instances wherein it appears actually to be so. We know well enough what we mean by liberty and contingency, and are withal well assured that we are free agents. We have also a sufficient notion of prescience, and are also no less assured of the reality of it. And, because both these are true, and there can be no real repugnance between one truth and another, we are also by consequence assured that there is a good harmony and agreement between them, and that they are consistent with each other. But, now, how to adjust their apparent opposition, or reconcile those instances of seeming contradiction and inconsistency, wherewith they press us ; this we neither know, nor are able with all our meditation to comprehend ; and that, because we have not an idea of the human soul, without which there is no possibility of comprehending how its free workings may be the objects of prescience, though our ideas of prescience and liberty were never so clear. Or, if this instance shall not be thought so proper, because the men with whom our present concern lies are pleased to disown the doctrine of prescience, let me desire them to consider  
whether

whether there be not many other difficulties concerning human liberty besides that taken from prescience, which they are no more able to get over than they are that. And that, for the very same reason; even because they have not an idea of the soul, upon the knowledge of which the solution of those, as well as some other difficulties in morality, does necessarily depend. Or, if they please, let them take an instance of a physical nature. We know well enough what it is to be in a place, and we know also as well what it is to be co-extended to a place. But, now, how being in a place may be without co-extension to a place, this is what we cannot comprehend (though, as to the thing itself, upon other considerations constrained to grant it); and that, because we are ignorant of the general nature of spirit, upon the clear conception of which the comprehension of the other does so depend that it cannot be had without it. And, indeed, we may conclude in general, that, whenever we have clear ideas of things, and yet are not able to comprehend the truth of them, it is because the knowledge of those things depends upon the truth of something else, whereof we have either no idea, or not such as is sufficiently clear. Which must be the true reason of the hitherto-presumed impossibility of finding out the exact proportion between a circle and a square. Why? Circle and square are very intelligible things, and how come we, then, not to be able to determine the precise and just proportion that is between them? It cannot be from any obscurity in the things themselves, much less from our want of having ideas of them; for we have as clear and exact ideas of these figures as we can have of any thing in the world. It must be, therefore, because the knowledge of their proportion depends upon the knowledge of some other thing whereof the idea fails us, which till we are [*be*] possessed of, we shall in vain endeavour to discover the other. Whereby it plainly appears that we are not only incapable of comprehending those truths that relate to things whereof we have no ideas,

but

but that even where we have ideas, and those very clear ones too, we may be as far from comprehending a truth as if we had none; merely upon the account of the dependence which that truth has upon some other thing whereof we have not at least a just idea. Which single consideration is enough for ever to spoil Human Reason for setting up for the Measure of Truth, even upon the supposition of its being finite. So very false is that arrogant assertion of a modern \* philosopher, "Quæcunque existunt humanæ menti pervestigabilia, præterquam infinitum." Whatever *is* [*be*] may be thoroughly comprehended by the mind of man, except infinite. And, again, "Unum duntaxat est quod omnem mentis nostræ vim longissimè excedit, ipsaq; sua natura, ut in se est, ab eâ cognosci nequit; infinitum puta:" there is but one only thing that far exceeds the force and reach of our mind, and that cannot of its own very nature be known by it as it is in itself, namely infinite. What? But one thing excepted from the verge, and placed beyond the reach of human knowledge? It is well that one thing is a pretty large one; but sure the author was ignorant of something else, that is himself, or *else* [*d*] he could never have advanced such a crude and ill-considered *a* [*d*] proposition.

33. And thus I have shewn at large, in a rational way, by arguing *a priori*, and from the nature of things, that Human Reason is not the Measure of Truth, and that, even upon the most liberal supposition of its being finite; and if it be not so, supposing truth to be finite, much less is it, supposing *it* [*truth*] (what it has been proved to be) of an infinite nature. If upon the former supposition it *exceeds* [*exceed*] the proportion of our reason, certainly upon the latter there will be no proportion between them. But whether our Reason *bears* [*bear*] no proportion to Truth, or whether it be only disproportionate to it, either.

\* Gerardi de Vries Professoris Ultrajeetini, exercitationes rationales de Deo, Divinisq; Perfectionibus. Pag. 248.



way it follows that it cannot be the Measure of it, which I cannot but now look upon as a proposition sufficiently demonstrated. And in all this I contend for no more than what is implied in that common and universally-approved maxim, even among those of the rational way, that we ought not to deny what is evident, for the sake of what is obscure, or depart from a truth which we see a necessity to admit, because of some difficulties attending it which we cannot solve ; which they say is an argument only of our ignorance, and not of the falshood of the thing. This, indeed, is a true rule, and such as must be allowed to hold good in all our reasonings, let the matter of them be what it will. Only I wish that the implication of the rule were as much minded as the rule itself is generally received. For it plainly implies, that there are some things, which, though plain and certain as to their existence, are yet incomprehensible and inexplicable as to their manner. But, then, as the incomprehensibility of the manner should not make us reject the truth of the thing when otherwise evident, so neither should the evidence we have of the truth of the thing make us disown the incomprehensibility of the manner ; since it is so far from being against the nature of truth that it should be incomprehensible, that you see we have discovered, even from the contemplation of its nature, that there are incomprehensible truths. Of which I might now subjoin some particular examples, but that I should fall very deep into a common place, being herein prevented by many other writers, particularly by the admirable one of *L' Art de Penser*, to the first chapter of whose fourth book I refer my reader ; where he shews by several, and some of them uncommon instances, that there are things which the mind of man is not capable of comprehending. After which he concludes with a very grave and useful reflection, which for the great advantage and pertinency of it to the present affair, though I refer my reader to the rest of the chapter, I shall here set down. “ The profit” (says he)

he) " that one may draw from these speculations is not  
 " barely to acquire the knowledge of them, which of  
 " itself is barren enough, but it is to learn to know the  
 " bounds of our understanding, and to force it to con-  
 " fess that there are things which it cannot comprehend.  
 " And therefore it is good to fatigue the mind with  
 " these kind of subtilties, the better to tame its pre-  
 " sumption and abate its confidence and daringness in  
 " opposing its feeble lights against the mysteries of reli-  
 " gion, under the pretence that it cannot comprehend  
 " them. For since all the force of human understand-  
 " ing is constrained to yield to the least atom of matter,  
 " and to own that it sees clearly that it is infinitely di-  
 " visible without being able to comprehend how this may  
 " be ; is it not apparently to transgress against reason,  
 " to refuse to believe the wonderful effects of the divine  
 " omnipotence, merely for this reason, that our under-  
 " standing cannot comprehend them ?" Yes, without  
 doubt it is ; as will better appear in the sequel of this  
 discourse. In the mean while, before I take leave of the  
 subject of this chapter, I have a double remark to make  
 upon it.

34. The first is, that since Truth in its full extent is  
 incomprehensible, we should not vainly go about to com-  
 prehend it, but be contented to be ignorant in many  
 things. And since there are some special truths in par-  
 ticular that are incomprehensible, we should not apply  
 our thoughts to the comprehension of all things at a ven-  
 ture, as some who are for understanding every thing, but  
 sit down first and consider whether they *are* [*be*] propor-  
 tionate to our capacities or *no* [*not*] ; and, as far as we  
 can, learn to distinguish what truths may and what may  
 not be comprehended by us, that so we may not lose that  
 time and pains in the contemplation of them, which  
 might be profitably employed in the consideration of  
 other things better suited to our capacity : as a great  
 many do, who busy themselves all their lives long about  
 such things, which, if they should study to eternity, they  
 would.

would not comprehend, and that indeed, because they require an infinite capacity to comprehend them. Whereas, the shortest compendium of study, and the best way to abridge the sciences, is to study only what we can master, and what is within the sphere of our faculties, and never so much as to apply ourselves to what we can never comprehend.

35. The other remark is, that the conclusion proved in this chapter does very much fortify and confirm that which was undertaken to be made out in the last, concerning the Distinction of Things Above, and Things Contrary to Reason. For, if there *are* [*be*] truths which we cannot comprehend, then it seems, what is above our comprehension may yet be true, and, if true, then to be sure not contrary to Reason; since whatever *is* [*be*] contrary to Reason is no less contrary to Truth, which, though sometimes above Reason, is yet never contrary to it.

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## C H A P. V.

*That therefore a Thing's being incomprehensible by Reason is of itself no concluding Argument of its not being True.*

1. **A**S there is nothing in man that deserves his consideration so much, and few things without him that deserve it more than that part of him wherein he resembles his Maker, so there is nothing more worthy of his consideration in that part, or that is at least more necessary to be considered by him, than the defects of it, without a due regard to which it would not be very safe for him to dwell much upon the consideration of the other, as being apt to seduce him into pride and vanity, to blow  
him



him up with self-conceit, and so by an imaginary greatness to spoil and corrupt that which is genuine and natural.

2. Now, the defects of our intellectual part, considered in their general heads, are, I suppose, sin, ignorance and error. And though sin in itself must be allowed to be of a worse nature and consequence than either ignorance or error (however some may fancy it a greater reproach to them to have their intellectuals questioned than their morals), and so upon that score may require more of our consideration, yet, upon another account, the defects of the understanding seem to need it more than those of the will; since we are not only apt to be more proud of our intellectuals than of our morals, but also to conceit ourselves more free and secure from error than we are from sin, though sin in the very nature and principle of it *implies* [*imply*] and *supposes* [*suppose*] error.

3. Pride, the presumed sin of the Angels, is also the most natural and hereditary one of man, his dominant and most cleaving corruption; the vice, as I may call it, of his planet and complexion. And that which we are most apt to be proud of is our understandings, the only faculty in us whose limits we forget. In other things we are sensible, not only of the general bounds of our nature, but also of the particular narrowness of them, and accordingly do not attempt any thing very much beyond our measure, but contain ourselves pretty reasonably within our line, at least are not such fools as to apply our strength to move the earth out of its place, or to set our mouths to drink up the sea, or to try with our eyes to look into the regions beyond the stars. But there is hardly any distance but to which we fancy our intellectual sight will reach; scarce any object too bright, too large or too far removed for it. Strange, that, when we consider that in us which makes us men, we should forget that we are so! And, yet, thus it is; when we look upon our understandings, it is with such a magnifying glass, that it appears in a manner boundless and unlimited to us, and we are dazzled with our own light.

4. Not

4. Not that it is to be presumed that there are any who, upon a deliberate consideration of the matter, have this formed and express thought, that their understandings are infinite. Human nature seems hardly capable of such excess. But, only, as the Psalmist says in another case of some worldly men, that their "inward thought is, "that their houses shall continue for ever." Psal. 49. Not meaning that any could be so grossly absurd, as positively and explicitly to conceive that their houses, any more than their own bodies, should last always, and never decay, but only that they had such a kind of a wandering and confuse imagination secretly lurking in their minds, and loosely hovering about them; so in like manner there *are* [*is*] a sort of people, who are parturient and teeming with a kind of confuse and unformed imagination, though perhaps they never bring it to an express and distinct thought, that their understandings have no bounds or limits belonging to them, though they cannot deny but that they have, if directly put to the question.

5. Accordingly, you shall find those whose conduct betrays this inward sentiment, who venture at all in their studies, stick at nothing, but will undertake to give a reason for every thing, and positively decide whatever *comes* [*come*] in their way, without suspense or reserve, imagining (confusely at least) they have a comprehension of all things, and that there is nothing too hard or knotty for them, nothing but what they either actually do [*comprehend*], or are capable of comprehending, if they once set themselves to it. And *from* [*d*] hence they roundly conclude, that whatever they *are* [*be*] not able to comprehend, is not true; and, accordingly, deny their belief to whatever *transcends* [*transcend*] their comprehension.

6. Now, I confess, there is no fault to be found with the consequence of these men, nor with their practice, as it relates to that consequence; which are both (as far as I can see) *exceeding* [*ly*] right, if their principle be once admitted: for if, indeed, it be really so that human reason is adequate and commensurate to truth, so that

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there

there is no truth but what it is able to comprehend, then it will certainly follow that whatever it cannot comprehend is not true, and there will need no other *nor* [*or*] better argument of the falsehood of any thing than the incomprehensibility of it. For their reasoning resolves into this form.

Whatever *is* [*be*] true, we can comprehend.  
 This we do not comprehend,  
 Therefore, this is not true.

Or thus,

If whatever *is* [*be*] true we can comprehend, then  
 what we cannot comprehend is not true.  
 But whatever *is* [*be*] true we can comprehend:  
*Ergo, &c.*

Where it is plain, that if the major of the first, or the minor of the second syllogism (wherein the principle of these men is contained), be allowed, there will be no avoiding [*of*] the conclusions of them. So that, if we admit that human reason is comprehensive of all truth, we are not consistent with ourselves, if we do not also grant that the incomprehensibility of a thing is a just warrant to conclude it not true.

7. But, then, on the other side, if this mighty principle, upon which such a weight is laid, and such great things built, be false, if human reason be not the measure of truth (as I think is with great evidence demonstrated in the last chapter), then is not the consequence as good this way, that therefore a thing's being incomprehensible by reason is no concluding argument of its not being true? For how are we inconsistent with ourselves, if, granting human reason to be commensurate to truth, we deny that the incomprehensibility of a thing argues it not to be true, but only because in denying that we contradict our principle? Or, which is all one, suppose the contradictory proposition to it to be true, viz. that human



man reason is not commensurate to truth. But, now, if, in saying that the incomprehensibility of a thing does not argue it not to be true, we, in the consequence of what we affirm, suppose that human reason is not the measure of truth, then it is as plain that the supposition of reason's not being the measure of truth will also oblige us to say that the incomprehensibility of a thing is no argument of its not being true. Whereby it is plain that the consequence is every whit as good thus, "Human Reason is not the measure of truth, therefore the incomprehensibility of a thing is no argument that it is not true;" as thus, "human reason is the measure of truth, therefore the incomprehensibility of a thing is an argument that it is not true." The only reason why he, that denies this latter consequence upon the supposition or concession of this latter principle is inconsistent with himself, being this, because, in denying the latter consequence he supposes the former principle, which principle therefore must as much infer the consequence that supposed it, viz. that a thing's being incomprehensible by reason is no warrant to conclude that it is not true.

8. And because this principle that human reason is not the measure of truth has been already proved at large, I look upon the grounds of this consequence as already laid; and, therefore, to shew the connexion that is between the one and the other (besides what I have even now said to that purpose) [I] need only add this further remark: that since human reason is not the measure of truth, or since there are incomprehensible truths, then it seems the incomprehensibility of a thing, and the truth of a thing, may consist together; or, in other words, the same thing may be at once true and incomprehensible. But now there cannot be in the whole compass of reasoning a more certain, or more evident maxim than this, that that which is when a thing is, or would be, supposing it were, is no argument that it is not. As for instance, suppose it should be objected, against the Copernican hypothesis

thesis of the motion of the earth, that it is repugnant to sense, since we see the sun and the stars rise and set, and move round about us. It is thought a sufficient answer to this to say, that, supposing the earth, and not the sun, did really move, these appearances would yet be the same as they are now, since sailing, as we do, between the sun and the stars (as a late writer \* expresses it), not the ship in which we are, but the bodies which surround us would seem to move. And it is most certain that if, supposing the earth did really move, the motion would yet seem to be in the sun and stars; then, the seeming motion of those bodies is no argument that the earth does not move.

9. Why, just so it is in the present case, when it is objected, against the truth of a thing, that it is incomprehensible by human reason : it is a sufficient answer to say, that this argues nothing ; since, if the thing were true, it might yet be incomprehensible. And it is most certain that if, supposing a thing to be true, it might yet be incomprehensible, then the incomprehensibility of a thing is no good objection against the truth of it. And, therefore, since we have proved that there are incomprehensible truths, and consequently that the truth of a thing and the incomprehensibility of the same thing may consist together, we may now, with all rational assurance, conclude, that the incomprehensibility of a thing is no argument that it is not true, any more than the seeming motion of the sun is an argument against the real one of the earth, since the former would be, even supposing the truth of the latter. And both, by virtue of this most evident and incontestable principle, that what may consist with the truth of any thing, can be no good argument that it is not true.

10. And, indeed, when it shall be considered how many things surpass our conception when we are children, which yet we are able well to comprehend when we are men ; how many things, again, are beyond the

\* Le Clerk's Physics, p. 14.

ken of ignorant and illiterate men, which yet are very intelligible and shine forth with full light to the men of art and learning; and how many things again, even among the learned, are now discovered and well understood by the help of algebra, which were mysteries to former ages, and are still beyond even the imagination of those who have not that noble and wonderful key of knowledge: when again it shall be further considered how many of those things, which we cannot even with the assistance of that commanding key unlock in this state of mortality, we may yet have a clear view of in that of separation, when delivered from the burthen of our flesh; and that many of those things which are too high for us then may yet be *of* [*on*] a level with the understanding of angels; and that what is above their capacity may yet be most clearly and distinctly perceived by the infinitely-penetrating and all-comprehensive intellect of God—I say, he, that shall but seriously enter into this single reflection, must needs discover himself much wanting in that stock of sense and reason he pretends to, if he still continue to measure the possibilities of things by their proportionableness to his understanding, or conclude any thing false or impossible, when he has no better reason for it *but* [*than*] only because he cannot comprehend it.

## C H A P. VI.

*That, if the Incomprehensibility of a Thing were an Argument of its not being true, Human Reason would then be the Measure of Truth.*

1. **A**S there is nothing more common than for people to hold certain principles that have an inseparable connexion with very bad consequences, and yet not professedly to hold those consequences, because either they



do not attend to them, or are not sensible that they do indeed follow from such principles, whereof we have two very pregnant instances in the maintainers of the Predestinarian and Solifidian systems; so, on the other hand, and for the same reason, there are those who take up, and with great fixedness adhere to certain consequences, without professedly holding those principles from which they truly flow, and to which (if traced to the head) they will infallibly lead them.

2. Of this we have a very particular instance (where I confess one would not expect to find it), in those of the Socinian persuasion. The reason these men of reason give why they will not believe the mysteries of the Christian faith, is because they are above their reason, they cannot comprehend them. Whereby they plainly imply, that they will believe nothing but what they can comprehend, or that nothing is to be believed that is incomprehensible, which is also a common maxim among them; who accordingly make *Above Reason* and *Contrary to Reason* to be one and the same thing. And whereas it is only the untruth of a thing that can make it unfit to be the object of faith, in saying they will not believe what they cannot comprehend, they do as good as say that what they cannot comprehend is not true, and so that the incomprehensibility of a thing is a just warrant to conclude it false. And all this they own and expressly declare, if not in these very terms, yet, at least, in such as are equivalent to them; as is too notorious and well known, to need any citations for the proof of it. But, now, though they do thus professedly own that the incomprehensibility of a thing by reason is an argument of its not being true, yet that human reason is the measure of truth, or that all truth is comprehensible by it, are (as I take it) propositions which they do not openly and professedly avow. For, as I noted in the introduction, it is such an odious and arrogant assertion, that they cannot, with any face of modesty or common decency, make a plain and direct profession of it; though at the same time it is [be] most certain, that this

this is the true principle of that consequence which they do professedly hold, viz. "that the incomprehensibility of a thing argues it not to be true;" and that this consequence does as necessarily lead back to that principle.

3. For, as, if human reason be the measure of truth, it follows, in the descending line, as a direct consequence, that the incomprehensibility of a thing argues it not to be true; so it follows, as well backwards *et per viam ascensus*, that, if the incomprehensibility of a thing argues [argue] it not to be true, then human reason is the measure of truth. Since, if it were not, the incomprehensibility of a thing (as is shewn in the preceding chapter) would then not argue it not to be true. If, therefore, it *does* [do], it is plain that human reason is the measure of truth. Which principle, whoever *disowns* [disown], ought also to renounce the other proposition, viz. "that the incomprehensibility of a thing is an argument of its untruth;" which, if yet he will embrace, notwithstanding, it is plain he holds the consequence without its principle, and has, indeed, no reason for what he affirms.

4. For, as he, who, granting human reason to be the measure of truth, denies yet that the incomprehensibility of a thing is an argument of its not being true, is, therefore, inconsistent with himself, because, in so doing, he supposes the contradictory to what he had before granted, viz. that human reason is not the measure of truth: so he that affirms that the incomprehensibility of a thing is an argument of its not being true, and yet denies that human reason is the measure of truth, is also as inconsistent with himself; because, in so doing, he supposes the contradictory to his own assertion, and does, in effect, say, that the incomprehensibility of a thing is not an argument of its not being true; as, most certainly, it would not be, in case human reason be not the measure of truth, as the foregoing chapter has sufficiently shewn. The short is, if the not being of A  
proves

*proves* [*prove*] that C is not, then the being of C proves that A is; since, if it were not, according to the first supposition, C could not be. And so, here, if reason's not being the measure of truth *proves* [*prove*] that the incomprehensibility of a thing is not an argument of its not being true, then, if the incomprehensibility of a thing be an argument of its not being true, it is plain that reason is the measure of truth; since, if it were not, then, according to the first supposition, the incomprehensibility of a thing would not be an argument of its not being true.

5. For how, I pray, comes the incomprehensibility of a thing to conclude the untruth of it? I cannot comprehend such a thing, therefore it is not true—where is the consequence? By what logic does this latter proposition follow from the former? Why, we have here the minor proposition and the conclusion, and to make a complete argument of it, we must add another, thus: if it were true, I should comprehend it, but I do not comprehend it, therefore it is not true. Whereby it appears to the eye that my not being able to comprehend a thing is no otherwise an argument of the untruth of it, than, as it is first pre-supposed, that, if it were true, I should be able to comprehend it. Which again resolving into this absolute proposition, that I am able to comprehend all truth, it plainly follows, that, if my inability to comprehend a thing be an argument that it is not true, then I am able to comprehend all truth, and that my reason is the measure and final standard of it.

6. I conclude, therefore, that if the incomprehensibility of a thing were an argument of its not being true, then human reason will be the measure of truth, and that they that hold the former ought also, if they will be consistent with themselves, to admit the latter. But because this is a false principle, that human reason is the measure of truth, therefore, I conclude again that the consequence that resolves into this principle is also false; since we may



as well conclude a consequence to be false because it leads back to a false principle, as a principle to be false because it is productive of a bad consequence. Which still further confirms and establishes the conclusion of the last chapter, viz. "that the incomprehensibility of a thing" "is no argument of its untruth;" which you see is now proved both backwards and forwards, and so made impregnable on all sides. We have proved it forwards, by shewing the falseness of that principle, that human reason is the measure of truth, and by thence arguing the said conclusion; and we have also proved it backwards, by shewing that the contrary supposition resolves into that false and already-confuted principle. And I do not see how any conclusion can be better proved.

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## C H A P. VII.

*That therefore the Incomprehensibility of a Thing is no just Objection against the Belief of it. With an account of the Cartesian Maxim, that we are to assent only to what is clear and evident.*

1. **I**T is a wonderful thing to consider the caprice of human nature, by what unaccountable springs its movements are ordered, and how oddly and unsteadily men act and manage themselves even in the same circumstances, and in relation to the same objects. Sometimes the obscurity and mysteriousness of a thing shall be a motive of credibility, and recommend it the rather to their belief. Thus you shall have a great many reject that philosophy as idle and chimerical which undertakes to explain the effects of nature by insensible particles, their

their different bigness, figure, contexture, local motion, rest, &c. merely because this is a plain, simple and intelligible account, such as they can easily and well conceive. The very easiness and clearness wherewith they conceive these principles is made an objection against them (though indeed it be a good presumption for them), and for that very reason they will not believe them to be the true principles of nature, whose effects they fancy must be resolved into causes more hidden and abstruse. And accordingly they find in themselves a greater inclination to lend attention to those that shall undertake the solution of them by the real chimeras of substantial forms, qualities, sympathies, antipathies, &c. or that shall go to account for them by the yet more obscure principles of the chymists, striking and filling their ears with those great but empty sounds, archeus, seminal spirit, astral beings, gas, blas, &c. which they receive with great satisfaction, not for their scientific light (for they are dark as may be, mere philosophic cant), but only because they are mysterious and abstruse, and therefore they fancy there must be somewhat more than ordinary in them, though they know not, *nor* [or], it may be, *never* [ever] considered what. And herein, as in some other instances, "Men love darkness better than light."

2. But, then, at another time, you shall have them enquiring after truth as Diogenes did after an honest man, with a candle in their hands, and not caring to go a step any further than they can see their way. Now, upon a sudden, they are all for clear and distinct ideas, full and adequate perceptions, demonstrative proofs and arguments, and nothing will serve or content them but light and evidence, and they will believe nothing but what they can comprehend. Strange diversity of conduct! Who would think two such vastly-distant extremes should meet together, I will not say in the same man, but in the same human nature, and that the very same creature (and such a one as styles itself rational too) should proceed by such uncertain measures, and act so inconsistently with itself;

self; sometimes embracing a thing for the sake of its obscurity, and sometimes again in another fit making that alone an invincible objection against the belief of it?

3. But it is plain, by the foregoing measures, that it is not. For, since truth is the general object of faith, it is evident that nothing can argue a thing to be absolutely incredible, or not reasonable to be believed, but that which at the same time argues it not to be true. For if true, then it is still within the compass of the general object of faith. But now we have shewn already that the incomprehensibility of a thing is no argument of its not being true, whence it clearly and closely follows that it is no argument *neither* [*either*] against its credibility. And if so, then we may believe it, notwithstanding its incomprehensibility, because we may believe whatever *is* [*be*] not absolutely incredible. So that there is no necessity that we should discard every thing we cannot conceive as unworthy of a rational belief, or that what is above our reason should be therefore above our faith too.

4. It is true, indeed, that the incomprehensibility of a thing is in itself no proper and direct argument why it should be believed; and he would be thought to give but an ordinary account of his faith, who, being asked why he believed such an incomprehensible thing, should answer "because it is incomprehensible." Which at best could pass only for a religious flourish, much such another as, *Credo quia impossibile*: and that, because the incomprehensibility of a thing is not directly and *per se* a criterion of truth (whether it may be *per accidens*, may be considered afterwards), whose natural and genuine character is not obscurity, but light and evidence. Not that nothing is true but what has this character (for we have already shewn the contrary in proving incomprehensible truths), but that, as whatever we clearly perceive is true, so our clear perceiving of a thing is the only sign, from the intrinsic nature of the thing itself, of the truth of it: incomprehensibility, therefore, is none, but, as such, abstracts from true and not true, and is equally common



common to both. But now that which may consist with a thing, supposing it false, can no more prove it true, than that which may consist with a thing, supposing it true, can prove it false; according to the tenor of the fifth chapter. The incomprehensibility, therefore, of a thing is no proper argument of the truth of it, and consequently no reason of itself, why it should be believed, and that, because it abstracts, as such, from true and false, and is too common to both, to prove either.

5. And because it is so, it is also further granted that the incomprehensibility of a thing is not only in itself no proper reason why it should be believed, but has also so far the nature of a dissuasive from believing, as to be a caution against a too hasty belief, till there appear some other motive from without, either from reason or authority, that shall determine the assent. In the mean while it advises to suspend. For the incomprehensibility of a thing being, as such, no reason why a man should believe it, it is plain that if he did believe it, considered only as in that state, he would believe it without reason. That, therefore, is a reason why he should suspend; a negation of reason being enough to withhold one's assent, though to give it, one had need have a positive reason. When, therefore, a thing appears incomprehensible, that, indeed, is sufficient reason to suspend our belief, till some prevailing consideration from without shall over-rule that suspension, by requiring our assent. But when it does so, then the incomprehensibility ought to be no argument to the contrary, and it would be every whit as absurd to reject a thing now, because of its incomprehensibility, as to believe it before, for that reason. And that, because, as the incomprehensibility of a thing is no reason for believing it, so it is no absolute reason against it.

6. If it were, so it would be in natural things, the objects of human and philosophic science, such as belong properly and immediately to the province and jurisdiction of reason. Here, if any where, the incomprehensibility of a thing would forbid all assent to it. And so it is supposed

posed to do by some, who, though far from denying the belief of incomprehensible things in religion, will yet tell you that, in physical contemplations, clearness and evidence *is* [*are*] to lead the way, and we are to proceed with our light before us, assenting to nothing but what we well comprehend. In matters of faith, indeed, they will allow that reason is to be submitted to revelation, and that we are to believe many things which pass our comprehension; but in matters of pure reason they will have us go no further than reason can carry us. Which, indeed, is right enough, if their meaning be that we are to assent to nothing but what, upon the whole matter, all things considered from without as well as from within, we have reason to believe true, and that we are never to proceed to judge or determine without some evidence or other; but then this will equally hold in matters of faith too, which is too rational an assent to be given at a venture, and we know not why, and whose Formal Reason (as has been already discoursed) is always clear. But if, their meaning be, that in matters of reason we must assent to nothing but what has an internal evidence, and what in itself, and by its own light, is comprehensible by us (as they seem to mean, or *else* [*d*] their distinction of the case of reason and the case of revelation is here impertinent), then I conceive that they set too narrow limits to our assent in matters of reason, when they allow it to be given only to things which in this sense are evident to us. For it is plain that there are many things in nature which we see are true, and must be true; and so not only may *assent*, but cannot help assenting to them, though, at the same time, we are not able to comprehend how they are, or can possibly be.

7. Not that our assent is then blind and wholly without evidence (for then we might as well assent to the contrary as to what we do, and would do better not to assent at all), but only that it has none from within, and from the intrinsic nature of the object, but only from some external consideration; much after the same man-

ner as it is in faith. In both which there may be a clear reason, why we should assent to an obscure thing. But then as the internal obscurity does not destroy the external evidence, so neither does the external evidence strike any light into the internal obscurity; or, in other words, as the reason for assenting is nevertheless clear because the matter assented to is obscure, so neither is the matter assented to ever the less obscure because the reason for assenting to it is clear. And yet, notwithstanding this internal obscurity of the matter, we assent to it because of the prevailing light of the external evidence. And this we do, not only in matters of faith (according to the restriction of some), but in the things of nature and reason too, where we are oftentimes forced by the pressing urgency of certain external and collateral considerations to assent to things internally obscure, and whose very possibility we cannot comprehend; as is plain in the great question of the Divisibility of Quantity, and other instances, whereof every thinking man's observation cannot but have already furnished him with variety. The incomprehensibility then of a thing is no just objection against our assent to it, even in matters of a rational nature; much less then is it in matters of faith. For if not in matters that belong to the court of reason, and where she sits as judge, then much less in things that are not of her proper jurisdiction; and if, notwithstanding the internal inevidence of an object, we think fit to assent to it upon rational considerations, much more may we, and ought we, upon the authority of the infallible God.

8. Indeed, if whatsoever is [*be*] above our reason were also (*as* [*which*] some pretend) as contrary to it, and there were nothing true but what was also comprehensible, and so the incomprehensibility of a thing were an argument of its not being true; then I confess we could not, as rational creatures, assent to an incomprehensible proposition upon any consideration whatsoever, no, not even that of divine authority. It is true, indeed, there could then be no such authority for incomprehensible things. But,  
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if there were, it is impossible we should regard it, because we could not have greater assurance either of the existence or of the truth of it, than we have already (upon this supposition) that the things revealed are not true. But now, if this supposition be no more than a supposition, if to be above reason *does* [*do*] not involve any contrariety to it, if there *are* [*be*] incomprehensible truths, and consequently the incomprehensibility of a thing *is* [*be*] no argument of its not being true (all which has been already proved); then it is plain that what is an incomprehensible may yet be a believable object (because within the possibility of truth), and then to render it actually believed there needs only some external evidence either from reason or authority. For what should hinder our assent to an incomprehensible thing when we have plain evidence from without for it, and its own internal obscurity is no argument against it? It is plain, therefore, that we ought to give our assent. And, since we do so, oftentimes, upon a ground of reason, much more ought we upon that more firm and immoveable ground of revelation. The short is, whatever *is* [*be*] no objection against the truth of a thing is none against the credibility of it, since truth is the general object of faith (unless you will say that a thing is unfit to be believed upon any other account besides want of truth); and, therefore, since we have already shewn that the incomprehensibility of a thing is no argument against the truth of it, it visibly follows that it is no argument against the belief of it *neither* [*either*]. Therefore an incomprehensible thing may be believed; and accordingly he, that refuses to believe any thing, is bound to give a better reason for it than because it is incomprehensible.

9. If it be said that this is reason enough, because faith is a rational act, and therefore what is above the comprehension of reason is as much above a rational belief, to this, besides what I have already remarked upon this occasion in the Chapter of faith\*, I here further reply,

\* Art. 15.

that it is true, indeed, and on both sides agreed, that faith is a rational act, but, in what sense, is the question. There are two very different senses, according to which it may be said to be so either in regard of the clearness of its formal reason, or in regard of the clearness of its object : either because it is founded upon an external evidence, or argument for believing, or because it proceeds upon an internal evidence, that appears in the very nature of the thing believed. If faith be said to be a rational act in the latter sense, the assertion is then false ; for so (that is, in respect of the object) we have shewn it to be an inevitable assent. But if it be said to be a rational act in the former sense, then indeed it is true, but nothing to the purpose ; since nothing hinders but that this external evidence may well consist with an internal inevidence ; or, in other words, that the clearness of the reason for believing may stand with the obscurity of the object believed. And therefore, though faith be a rational act, yet it does not hence follow that what is above reason is also above faith, and cannot rationally be believed ; because the act of faith is said to be rational, not in respect of the evidence of the object, but only that of its formal reason or motive. And therefore, though there be no evidence in the object, yet it is not thereby rendered incapable of being the matter of faith ; because the evidence, which faith as a rational act supposes, is wholly of another kind. There seems, indeed, a kind of opposition as to the sound, between faith's being an act of reason, and the believing [of] what is above reason. And this, it may be, is that, which imposes upon the minds, or the ears shall I say ? of them that urge it as an objection. I cannot imagine what else should, for I am sure there is no contradiction in the sense. It is true indeed, evidence in the act and not-evidence in the act are contradictories, because *ad idem* ; and so are not-evidence in the object and evidence in the object, for the same reason. But there is no contradiction between evidence in the act and not-evidence in the  
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the object; and therefore these may stand together, though the other cannot.

10. But, to lay open the fallacy of this great and very popular objection yet a little more to the eye (though it must be a very blind one that does not see it already), I will put it into form, and give it a formal answer.

If Faith be a rational act, then what is above Reason  
cannot rationally be believed,  
But Faith is a rational act, *Ergo*.

For answer to this, I distinguish. If, by rational act, be meant an act founded upon internal evidence, or the evidence of the object, then I deny the minor; faith is not, so, a rational act. But if, by rational act, be meant an act founded upon external evidence or the evidence of its formal reason or motive, then indeed I grant the minor, but deny the consequence, which is none at all; for it does not at all follow, because faith is a rational act, meaning by it that it proceeds upon external evidence and that there is a clear reason for believing, that therefore the thing believed may not from within and in its own nature be altogether inevident and so above the comprehension of reason. For though evidence be contradictory to nonevidence in the same, yet evidence in the act is no way contradictory to inevidence in the object, and consequently does not at all exclude it. They may therefore both stand together, and consequently what is above reason may be believed, for any thing that this celebrated objection from faith's being a rational act makes to the contrary; which truly is so gross and palpable a sophism, that I cannot but wonder how it could ever impose upon so many learned men as it has done, and some of them very acute and nice considerers of things. But I hope the fallaciousness of it is by this [*time*] so plainly and fully detected, that I shall not think those heads worth much informing that shall be further imposed on by it.



11. But what then shall we say to that great and fundamental maxim so pressingly inculcated by Des Cartes and his followers, and not disallowed of by others, that "we are to assent to nothing but what is clear and evident?" If to nothing but what is clear and evident, how then to what is obscure and inevident? Or, if to what is obscure and inevident, how then to nothing but what is clear and evident? Do not these seem flat contradictions one to the other? and how then shall we adjust the matter between them? It must be either by denying that Cartesian maxim to be true; or by shewing that, though it be true, it does not contradict the assertion here maintained, but is consistent with it. The first way I shall not take. I allow the maxim to be true, and not only so, but to be withal of the greatest importance of any that can be given for the direction of the mind of man in order to the avoiding of error: the only remedy and caution against which is, never to let our judgments prevent our conceptions, or to assent to any thing that we have only a confuse notion of, and where we see only by halves and with an imperfect light, or perhaps do not see at all; but to have a clear understanding of the matter before we adventure to judge of it, and to maintain an evidence in all our reasonings. Which accordingly is made by M. Malebranche the first of those rules which in his treatise of method he lays down to be observed in the inquiry after truth. And indeed to do otherwise is to make a wrong use of our intellectual powers, particularly of that liberty we have to suspend judgment, till the fulness of evidence *requires* [*require*] it; and the want of observing this rule is also the occasion of most of our errors and wrong assents, as the same excellent \* person shews it to have been in particular to the authors of the Scholastic Philosophy.

12. I shall not therefore go about to save my own assertion by denying Des Cartes's maxim, but rather by shewing that, according to the true sense and intendment

\* Recherche de la Verité. Tom 2. p. 165.

of it, it does not contradict it. But first we must see what the true sense of it is, or rather in what sense it is true, though this may be without much difficulty collected by any attentive reader from what has been already said in several places of this chapter, wherein I have in great measure prevented this objection. But, to consider it more directly. To verify this maxim, that we are to assent to nothing but what is clear and evident, the usual way has been to distinguish between matters of Faith, and matters of Reason. In matters of faith, say they, we are to believe many things which we cannot comprehend: and here then it seems this rule must be laid aside. But in matters of reason we must assent to nothing but what is clear and evident: and here then it seems it holds. Accordingly when it is objected against certain articles of faith, that they are not to be comprehended by reason, it is usual to reply, that these things do not belong to reason, &c. implying that, if they did, then indeed the objection would be good, and the incomprehensibility of such things would be an argument against assenting to them, which implies again that in matters of reason we must not assent to any thing but what is clear and evident, though in matters of faith we may. But we have remarked already, that even in matters of pure reason we are forced to assent to many things which we cannot comprehend, and that even in matters of faith we do in a certain sense assent upon clear evidence. This distinction therefore will not do.

13. Instead therefore of distinguishing between matters of faith and matters of reason, I think it will be better to distinguish of evidence. We are to assent to nothing, save what is clear and evident, says our maxim. Very good. Now if, by evidence, here, be meant internal evidence, and the sense be, that we are to assent to nothing but what in its own nature, and by a light intrinsic to it, is evident; then the maxim is false: and that, not only in matters of faith, but also in matters of reason *too* [*d*], wherein we find ourselves often constrained to  
assent

assent to things that have not this eternal inevidence; but are (as to what respects the nature of the things themselves) altogether obscure and incomprehensible. But if, by evidence, here, be meant evidence at large, abstracting from internal or external, and the sense be, that we are to assent to nothing but what has some evidence or other, either internal or external, or what is some way or other evident to us, and what we see plainly to be true by a light shining from within or from without, in short, what we have one way or other sufficient ground or reason to assent to; then the maxim is undoubtedly true, and will hold universally, not only in matters of reason, but also in matters of faith too [d], which (as was shewn in the chapter of faith) is the conclusion of a syllogism, and so a rational act, and proceeds upon as much, though not the same kind of evidence, as any other conclusion does: and that, even in the belief of incomprehensible things, which it would be absurd, nay impossible to believe, if there were no reason to believe things above reason. According to a saying, as I take it, of St. Austin [’s], in one of his letters to this purpose, “ That we could not bring  
 “ ourselves to believe what is above our reason, if reason  
 “ itself did not persuade us that there are things which  
 “ we should do well to believe, although we are [be]  
 “ not capable of comprehending them.” So then, in short, if this maxim, that we are to assent to nothing but what is evident, be understood of internal evidence; then it is false, not only in matters of faith, but also in matters of reason, wherein things intrinsically inevident are assented to. But if it be understood of evidence at large, then it is true, not only in matters of reason, but also in matters of faith, which (as has been often noted), is reasonable in its fund and principle, and whose evidence must be clear, though its object may be obscure.

14. In this large therefore and indefinite sense of the word evidence the maxim is to be understood. We are to assent to nothing but what is clear and evident, that is, we ought to make use of our liberty of suspension so far



as not to give our assent to any thing but what, all things considered and upon the whole, appears evident to us; what by some light or other we see and plainly perceive to be true; and what in one word we find sufficient reason either from within or from without to assent to. According to that well-known sentence, wherewith Des Cartes concludes his wonderful system, "*Nihilque ab ullo credi velim, nisi quod ipsi evidens & invicta ratio persuadebit.*" I would have nothing believed by any one but what by evident and irresistible reason he shall be convinced of. And, certainly, he would be very unreasonable that should desire more. For, to assent without evidence of one sort or other, that the thing assented to is true, is to assent without a why or wherefore; and, to assent so, is to assent without reason, which again is to assent not as a rational creature; and as man ought not, so to be sure God cannot require such an assent. To assent, therefore, to nothing but what, upon some consideration or other, is clear and evident to us, and what we have good reason to embrace as true, is certainly a maxim of unquestionable truth, and of universal extent, that holds in all matters whatsoever, whether of reason or of faith; in the former of which an assent without evidence would be the act, and in the latter the sacrifice, of a fool.

15. And, that this is the true sense wherein Des Cartes intended his maxim, as well as the true sense of the maxim itself, is plain from the occasion of it, which, as all know who are not utter strangers to, or very negligent readers of his books, was the bringing-in and obtruding [of] so many things in the vulgar philosophy, whereof the introducers of them had such confuse notions, and of whose reality and existence they had no firm and solid reasons to assure them, such as substantial forms, really inhering accidents and qualities, and the like, which served rather to darken than clear up the science of nature, and were the occasions of a thousand errors in the superstructures that were raised upon those imaginary and chimerical prin-

principles. In opposition to, and as a remedy for which, he lays down this fundamental maxim, to be carefully observed by all the disciples of truth in their whole intellectual progress, never to assent to any thing but what is clear and evident, that is, to nothing but of whose truth and reality they are fully assured, and have sufficient reason to assent to [it]. This is the true sense of the maxim, this is the sense of its author, and in this sense it is undeniably true. And that, without any prejudice to our present conclusion, with which (as thus explained) it is very consistent. For it is now very easy to discern that we may believe an incomprehensible thing, and yet at the same time, according to this Cartesian maxim, assent to nothing but what is clear and evident, because the evidence of faith is external; and, that there may be an external evidence to assent to a thing internally inevident, is no contradiction.

16. Which, by the way, may serve to discover as well the injustice as the impertinence, 1. of those who make use of this maxim as an objection against the belief of things above reason; 2. of those who take occasion *from* [d] hence to traduce the Cartesian philosophy as favourable to, and looking with a very propitious aspect upon Socinianism, and indeed as little better than an introduction to it, only because it talks so much of clear and distinct ideas and conceptions, and of assenting to nothing but what is clear and evident: but most of all, 3dly, of those who proceed even to traduce the author himself as a secret friend to the cause, and no better than a Socinian in disguise. It would have been indeed a considerable glory and advantage to that (or any other interest), to have had so great a master of reason a friend to it. But he certainly was not, if with his words he *has* [have] transmitted to us his real thoughts, which would be great uncharity to question, and with a witness to assent to what is not evident.

17. He was indeed a great master in the rational way, but no magnifier or exalter of human reason. So far from

from that, that he seems to have had the most inward and feeling sense of its infirmities and defects, and the best to have understood what a poor little thing it is to be a man, of any one in the world. As may be abundantly collected from several passages in his writings (besides that the whole vein of them runs that way), particularly those two final sentences wherewith he shuts up his principles and his metaphysics, “*At nihilominus memor meæ tenuitatis, nihil affirmo,*” &c. and, “*Naturæ nostræ infirmitas est agnoscenda.*” Which plainly shew what a low, debasing sense he had both of himself and of human nature in general: as it is natural for every man to have, more and more, the wiser he grows, and the further he advances in knowledge; which, when all is done (provided you take a good dose of it), is the best cure of pride and vanity.

18. And as he had *thus* [*so*] slender an opinion both of human reason and his own, so he appears to have had also at the same [*time*] such an high-raised and elevated sense of the immense grandeur of God and of the magnificence of his works, and how inscrutable the profundities of both are to such finite and contracted minds as ours, as can scarce any where be paralleled. Two characters, certainly, of spirit, that are none of the aptest to dispose a man to Socinianism. But, not to dwell any longer upon rational presumptions, there is a certain plain and deciding place in the writings of this great man (which one would think had escaped the eyes of some), that is enough for ever to silence the calumny of his being even in the least Socinianized, and to shame those that have so little conscience or judgment as to stain his memory with it. For who can suspect him [*to be*] in the least infected with that head-seizing disease, which is now become so popular and epidemic, when he shall hear him still purging, and apologizing for himself, in these vindictory words \*?

\* Princip, Philos. p. 7.

“Credenda



“Credenda esse omnia quæ a Deo revelata sunt, quamvis captum nostrum excedant.” And again, “ita si forte nobis Deus de seipso, vel aliis aliquid revelet, quod naturales ingenii nostri vires excedat, qualia jam sunt Mysteria Incarnationis & Trinitatis. non recusabimus illa credere, quamvis non clare intelligamus. Nec ullo modo mirabimur multa esse, tum in immensa ejus natura, tum etiam in rebus ab eo creatis, quæ captum nostrum excedant.” Now, how glad should I be to see all the Socinians in Christendom subscribe to this form of words! And is it not strange, then, that he, whose originally they are, should be suspected of Socinianism, and that his philosophy too should be thought to lead to it? But the truth is, the Cartesian philosophy leads just as much to Socinianism, as philosophy in general does to Atheism; and I will venture to say, and be bound to make it good, that as no good philosopher can be an Atheist, so no good Cartesian can be a Socinian.

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## C H A P. VIII.

*Wherein is shewn what is the true Use of Reason in Believing.*

1. **R**EASON being the great character and principle of man, that makes him like to the angels above him and distinguishes him from the beasts that are below him, and which therefore only are below him for want of the rational power (being many of them, in regard of their bodily endowments, upon a level with him, and some

some beyond him), it is but just and natural it should appear in all that he does, and preside and govern in all his actions. For, as the conduct of the infinitely-wise and all-knowing God does always carry in it the characters of his essential and consubstantial reason, even of him who is the wisdom of the Father, the true intelligible light; so should also the conduct of man express in proportion the signatures of his reason, and though he cannot act by such exact and unerring measures as his Glorious Maker, ~~nor~~ [or] yet with all that perfection of wisdom that even some created intelligences express, yet, at least, he should act like himself, and not, by doing any thing absurd or unaccountable, deny his reasonable nature.

2. This has served for a principle to some scholastic and moral writers whereon to build a very high, and (as some think) very severe conclusion, viz. that there is no individual action of man purely indifferent. Which I suppose may be true enough of those actions of his which are properly human, I mean that are done deliberately, with fore-thought and consideration; every one of which must, as far as I can see, be either good or bad according to the circumstances wherewith they are cloathed, however, specifically considered in relation to their objects only, and as abstracted from those circumstances, some of them may be indifferent. And, certainly, we cannot suppose any action of a more neutral and adiaphorous nature than an unprofitable word; and yet of such he, that is to be our judge, tells us we shall render an account in the day of judgment. Which plainly shews that there is no such thing as indifferency in the actions of man as individually and concretely considered; but that all of them are either good or bad according as the principle, manner, end and other circumstances are, that attend the doing of them. And that, because, man being a rational creature, the order of reason is due at least to all his deliberate actions, which accordingly ought to carry the characters of a rational nature in them, the want of which will be enough to render any of them evil and imperfect.

3. But then, if reason ought to preside and direct in all the deliberate actions of man, much more ought it in things of the greatest moment and consequence, wherein his interest and welfare *is* [*are*] more nearly concerned, and which accordingly require his greatest consideration, and the use of the best light that he has. And because there cannot be a thing of greater consequence and concernment to him than religion, upon which both his present and his future, his temporal and his eternal happiness *does* [*do*] entirely depend, hence it follows that the principal use he ought to make of his rational faculty is in religion: that here, if any where, he ought to think, consider, advise, deliberate, reason and argue; consult both his own light, and that of others; neglect no advantage that may be had from nature or art, from books or men, from the living or the dead; but employ all possible means for his direction and information, and not be as the "horse and mule which have no understanding, Psal. "32. 10." For it was for this great end and purpose that his reason was given him, and this is the best use he can make of it. As for the study of nature; that turns to too little an account: and, as for the affairs of civil life; they, in themselves, and without relation to another world, are too little and inconsiderable for us to suppose that our reason was given us for the management of them. Religion only bears proportion to so noble a faculty, is most worthy of its application, and can also best reward the due exercise and use of it, and accordingly it is upon religion that it will be best bestowed.

4. Nor is there any thing in religion that may justly fear to be brought before the bar of human reason, or to undergo the test of its severest discussion. The heathen religion indeed might, for which cause those that drew its picture cast a shade upon a great part of it, and would not venture to expose it to common view. And the too-much-heathenized religion of some Christians may also very deservedly retire behind the curtain, and decline coming to the light, for fear the absurdities and monstrous inconsistencies



inconsistencies of it should be laid open. But certainly there is not any thing, *neither* [*either*] doctrine *nor* [*or*] precept, in that true religion that is revealed by God, in evangelical christianity, that *need* [*needs*] fly the light of reason, or refuse to be tried by it. Christian religion is, all over, a reasonable service, and the author of it is too reasonable a master to impose any other, or to require (whatever his vicar may do) that men should follow him blindfold, and pull out their eyes to become his disciples. No: he, that miraculously gave sight to so many, has no need of, *nor* [*or*] pleasure in the blind; nor has his divine religion any occasion for such judges or professors. For it is the religion of the eternal and uncreated wisdom, the divine word, the true light of the world, and the universal reason of all spirits; and it is impossible that he should reveal any thing that contradicts the measures of sound discourse, or the immutable laws of truth, as indeed it is that any divine revelation should be truly opposite to right reason (however it may sometimes be above it), or that any thing should be theologically true, which is philosophically false, as some with great profoundness are pleased to distinguish. For the light of reason is as truly from God as the light of revelation is, and therefore, though the latter of these lights may exceed and out-shine the former, it can never be contrary to it. God, as the sovereign truth, cannot reveal any thing against reason, and, as the sovereign goodness, he cannot require us to believe any such thing. Nay, to descend some degrees below this, he cannot require us to believe, not only what is against reason, but even what is without it. For, to believe any thing without reason, is an unreasonable act; and it is impossible that God should ever require an unreasonable act, especially from a reasonable creature.

5. We therefore not only acknowledge the use of reason in religion, but also that it is in religion that it is chiefly to be used; so far are we from denying the use of it there. And it is a little unfairly done of our adversaries so much to insinuate the contrary as they do. For

I cannot take it for less than such an insinuation, when they are arguing with us against the belief of the Christian mysteries, to run out as they usually do into harangues and flourishes (whereof, by the way, I know none more guilty than the author of Christianity not Mysterious), about the reasonableness of the Christian religion, and the rational nature of faith, what a reasonable act the one is and what a reasonable service the other is, &c. as if we were against the use of reason in religion, or were for a blind, groundless, and unaccountable faith; or as if, because we hold the belief of things above reason, therefore we are for having no reason for our belief. This, I say, is an unfair insinuation, and such as argues some want either of judgment or sincerity (I do not know which), in those that suggest it. For they seem plainly, by running so much upon this vein, to imply as if it were part of the question between us, whether there be any use of reason in religion, or whether faith *is* [*be*] to be founded upon reason or *no* [*not*]. But now this is no part of the controversy that lies between us; we acknowledge the use of reason in religion as well as they, and are as little for a senseless and irrational faith as they can be. This, therefore, being common to us both, is no part of the question, and they do ill to insinuate that it is, by so many popular declamatory strains upon the reasonableness of religion, and in particular of faith; whereas they do, or should, know, that the thing in question between us is not whether there be any use of reason to be made in believing, but only what it is, or wherein the true use of it does consist.

6. Now this we may determine in a few words, having already laid the grounds of it. For, since the incomprehensibility of a thing is no concluding argument against the truth of it, nor, consequently, against the belief of it (as is shewn in the three foregoing chapters), it is plain that the proper office and business of a believer's reason is to examine and enquire, not whether the thing proposed be comprehensible or not, but only whether it be revealed by God or *no* [*not*]; since, if it be,

be, the incomprehensibleness of it will be no objection against it. That, therefore, ought to be no part of its question or deliberation, because indeed it is not to the purpose to consider whether such a thing be, when, if it were, it would be no just objection. The only considerable thing then here is whether such a proposition be indeed from God, and *has* [*have*] him for its author or *no* [*not*]. And here reason is to clear her eyes, put the matter in the best light, call in all the assistance that may be had both from the heart and the head, and determine of the thing with all the judgment and all the sincerity that she can. But, as to the comprehensibility or incomprehensibility of the article, this is quite besides the question, and ought therefore to be no part of her scrutiny or debate; since, if it were *never* [*ever*] so much above her comprehension, it would be never the less proper object for her belief.

7. The sum is, the incomprehensibility of a thing is no argument against the belief of it; therefore, in the believing of a thing, the proper work of my reason is not to consider whether it be incomprehensible. But, when a thing is proposed to me as from God, all that my reason has to do in this case is seriously, soberly, diligently, impartially, and (I add) humbly, to examine whether it *comes* [*come*] with the true credentials of his authority, and *has* [*have*] him for its real author, or *no* [*not*]. This is all that Reason has to do in this matter; and, when she has done this, she is to rise from the seat of judgment, and resign it to Faith; which either gives or refuses her assent, not as the thing proposed is comprehensible or not comprehensible, but as it is either revealed or not revealed.



## C H A P. IX.

*An Application of the foregoing Considerations to the Mysteries of Christianity.*

1. **H**AVING thus raised the shell of our building to its due pitch, we have now only to roof it by making a short application of the principles, laid down and settled in the former chapters, to the mysteries of the Christian religion, against the truth and belief of which it plainly appears, from the preceding considerations, that there lies now no reasonable objection. For, if human reason be not the measure of truth; and if, therefore, the incomprehensibility of a thing to human reason be no argument of its not being true, *nor* [or] consequently against its being believed; and, if the only use and employment of reason in believing be to consider, not the internal evidence of the thing, whether the article be comprehensible or *no* [not], but whether it be truly revealed by God: I say, if these things *are* [be] so, as we have abundantly proved them to be, then, from these premises, the clear and undeniable consequence is that the incomprehensibility of the Christian mysteries is no just reason why they should not be believed, and so, that we may believe them, though we should suppose them (what yet some deny) to be incomprehensible.

2. Nay, so far is the incomprehensible sublimity of these mysteries from being a sufficient objection against the belief of them, that accidentally and indirectly it may be improved into a considerable argument for them, and such as may serve to recommend them to our faith; inasmuch as it is a very strong presumption that they are of no human origin, but have God for their author, it being reasonable to suppose that what does so very much transcend the capacity of man to comprehend, does no less exceed his ability to invent. And, accordingly, the  
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incomprehensibility of our mysteries, for which some will have them to be false, is made use of by a very rational author as an argument of their truth. And it may be worth while to let the reader see how he manages it in relation to one of the most sublime of them. “ \* The  
 “ more obscure *are* [*d*] our mysteries [*are*], strange paradox! the more credible they now appear to me.  
 “ Yes, I find, even in the obscurity of our mysteries, received as they are by so many different nations, an  
 “ invincible proof of their truth. How, for instance,  
 “ shall we accord the Unity with the Trinity, the society of three different persons in the perfect simplicity  
 “ of the Divine Nature? This, without doubt, is incomprehensible, but not incredible. It is, indeed,  
 “ above us; but, let us consider a little, and we shall  
 “ believe it; at least if we will be of the same religion  
 “ with the Apostles. For, supposing they had not known  
 “ this ineffable mystery, or that they had not taught it  
 “ to their successors, I maintain that it is not possible  
 “ that a sentiment so extraordinary should find in the  
 “ minds of men such an universal belief as is given to it  
 “ in the whole church, and among so many different  
 “ nations. The more this adorable mystery appears  
 “ monstrous (suffer the expression of the enemies of our  
 “ faith); the more it shocks human reason; the more the  
 “ imagination mutinies against it; the more obscure, incomprehensible and impenetrable it is; the less credible  
 “ is it that it should naturally insinuate itself into the  
 “ minds and hearts of all Christians, of so many and  
 “ *so* [*such*] distant countries. Never do the same errors  
 “ spread universally; especially such sort of errors which  
 “ so strangely offend the imagination, which have nothing sensible in them, and which seem to contradict  
 “ the most simple and common notions. If Jesus Christ  
 “ did not watch over his church, the number of the Unitarians would quickly exceed that of the Orthodox

\* Entretiens sur la Metaphys. & sur la Relig. p. 562.

“ Christians.

“ Christians. For there is nothing in the sentiment of  
 “ these heretics, that does not enter naturally into the  
 “ mind. And it is very conceivable that opinions that  
 “ are proportioned to our understandings may establish  
 “ themselves in time. But, that a truth so sublime, so  
 “ far removed from sense, so cross to human reason, so  
 “ contrary, in short, to all nature, as is this great mys-  
 “ tery of our faith; that a truth, I say, of this cha-  
 “ racter, should spread itself universally, and triumph  
 “ over all nations where the Apostles had preached the  
 “ gospel, supposing that these first preachers of our  
 “ faith had neither known any thing *nor* [or] said any  
 “ thing of this mystery, this, certainly, is what cannot  
 “ be conceived by any one that has *never* [ever] so little  
 “ knowledge of human nature. That there should be  
 “ heretics that should oppose a doctrine so sublime is no-  
 “ thing strange, nor am I surprized at it. On the con-  
 “ trary, I should be very much, if never any body had  
 “ opposed it. This truth wanted but little of being  
 “ quite oppressed. It is very possible. For it will be  
 “ always reckoned a commendable undertaking to attack  
 “ that which seems to clash with reason. But that at  
 “ length the mystery of the Trinity should prevail, and  
 “ should establish itself universally wherever the reli-  
 “ gion of Jesus Christ was received, without its being  
 “ known and taught by the Apostles, without an au-  
 “ thority and a force divine, there needs, methinks,  
 “ but an ordinary measure of good sense to acknowledge  
 “ that nothing in the world is less probable. For it is  
 “ not in the least likely that a doctrine so divine, so  
 “ above reason, so removed from whatever may strike  
 “ the imagination and the senses, should naturally come  
 “ into the thought of man.”

3. You see here how this excellent person strikes light out  
 of darkness, by improving even the incomprehensibility  
 of the Christian mysteries into an argument for the truth  
 and credibility of them, and so turning the artillery of  
 our adversaries against themselves. This, indeed, is a  
 bold



bold atchievement, and as fortunate a one too ; for I think there is a great deal of force and weight in his reasoning. But I need not push the matter so far, nor follow so home into the enemy's camp, as to plant their own cannon against them. It is sufficient to the design of the present undertaking, and as much as I am led to by the principles before established, to conclude that the incomprehensibility of the Christian mysteries is no argument against them. This, therefore, I insist upon, and (if my reason mightily deceive me not), dare engage finally to stand to. For, if (as it has been shewn) the incomprehensibility of a thing in general be no conclusive argument against either the truth or the credibility of it, then, since negative propositions do separate the attribute from the subject according to all the extent which the subject has in the proposition, what consequence can be more clear than that the incomprehensibility of our mysteries is no argument against the belief of them ? I conclude, therefore, that it is none ; and that they ought never the less to be believed for their being incomprehensible, supposing them otherwise sufficiently revealed.

4. Whether they *are* [*be*] so or *no* [*not*] is besides my undertaking at present to examine, nor need I engage my pen in this question, since the affirmative side of it is so obvious to every eye that can but read the bible, and has been withal so abundantly and convincingly made good by those abler hands which have gone into the detail of the controversy, and undertaken the particular defence of the Christian mysteries. This part of the argument, therefore, being so well discharged already, I shall concern myself no further with it than only in consequence and pursuance of the former principles, to bestow upon it this one single necessary remark, viz. that, as the incomprehensibility of the Christian mysteries is no just objection against the belief of them, supposing them otherwise sufficiently revealed, so neither is it a just objection against their being so revealed, supposing the plain, obvious and literal construction of the words does naturally and directly  
lead

lead to such a sense: and that it does so is not, I think, offered to be denied, and the thing itself is plain enough to extort an acknowledgment; but then it is pretended that there is a necessity of [*for*] having recourse to a different construction, and to understand the words in another sense, because of the unconceivableness and incomprehensibleness of that which their proper and grammatical scheme does exhibit. But, by the tenor of this whole discourse, it evidently appears that there is no such necessity; since, to admit an incomprehensible sense, has nothing absurd or inconvenient in it, and that, because the incomprehensibility of a thing is no argument of the untruth of it. *From* [*d*] whence it plainly follows, that it is no more an objection against its being revealed, than it is an objection against the belief of it, supposing it were revealed; there being nothing but the untruth of a thing that can be a reasonable obstruction against either.

5. We are, therefore, to take the words of scripture according to their proper and most natural sense, and not seek out for forced and strained interpretations, upon the account of the incomprehensibility of that which is apparently genuine and natural. And, if the revelation be otherwise plain, and such as we would accept of in another case, and about matters which we can well comprehend, we ought not to think it the less so, because the sense of it, so understood, is such as we cannot reconcile to our apprehensions and conceptions of things. For, notwithstanding that, it may be true; since by this time we may be sufficiently satisfied that there are many incomprehensible truths. The incomprehensibility of a thing is, therefore, no argument against its being revealed; any more than it is against the belief of it, supposing it were. Which opens an immediate entrance to the Christian mysteries; which, I doubt not, would be thought sufficiently revealed, were it not for the incomprehensibility of them, the only objection that can be pretended against their revelation.

6. I have hitherto argued upon the supposition that the mysteries of Christianity (those doctrines I mean that are so called)

called) are above reason, and such as do transcend our comprehension; and have shewn that, even upon that supposition, there is no reasonable objection against the belief of them; that they are never the less believable for their being incomprehensible. But, what, if I should recal this concession, and put our adversaries to the proof that they are indeed above human reason and comprehension? They cannot be ignorant that there are those, that contend they are not, and with great shew of reason offer to prove it, by endeavouring to render a conceivable and intelligible account of them. If these men should be in the right (which I do not think necessary, at present, to enquire into), it would be a further advantage to our cause, and such, as though I do not now insist upon it, I need not lose the benefit of. But, if it should prove that they are not in the right, the cause of our Christian mysteries is not much concerned in the loss of that pillar, but can support itself well enough without it, as having another that is sufficient to bear its weight; since, though we should suppose these sacred doctrines to be *never* [ever] so incomprehensible to our reason, it does by no consequence follow (as from the argument of this whole discourse is apparent), that therefore they may not be due objects of our faith.

7. Should any one now be so fond of objection as to draw one against the mysteries of Christianity from the use of the word mystery in scripture, which knows no other mysteries but such as before the revelation of them were undiscovered, not considering whether they were in themselves conceivable or *no* [not]; I must tell him that I do not know that ever I met in any controversy with a less pertinent objection, as much as it is made of by a late bold writer\*; who heaps together a great many texts to shew the signification of the word mystery in the new testament, that it signifies not things in themselves inconceivable; but only such as were not known before they were revealed. Well, be it so, as this gentleman pretends (though, I believe, upon examination it would

\* Christianity not Mystrious, p. 90.



appear otherwise), yet what is this to the purpose? For, do we dispute about names or things? The question is not whether the scripture *expresses* [*express*] inconceivable things by the name of mysteries, but whether there be not things in scripture above our conception (call them by what name you will); and, if there be, whether their being so above our conception be an argument why they should not be believed. Now, to these inconceivable things it has been the common use of church-writers to apply the name of mysteries, which, if the thing be granted, he must be a great lover of cavil and wrangle that will contend about it [*d*]. But the learned bishop of Worcester \* has already prevented me in the consideration of this objection; for which reason, together with the frivolousness of it, I shall pursue it no further.

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## C H A P. X.

### *The Conclusion of the Whole, with an Address to the Socinians.*

1. **A**ND thus I have led my Reader through a long course of various reasoning, and, perhaps, as far as he is willing to follow me; though I hope his journey has not been without some pleasure that may deceive and some profit that may in part reward the labour of it. I have shewn him what Reason is, and what Faith is, that so he may see, from the absolute natures of each, what habitude and relation they have to one another, and how the darkness and obscurity of the latter may consist with the light and evidence of the former. I have also

\* Serm. of the Mysteries of the Christian Faith.

considered

considered the distinction of things above reason and things contrary to reason, and shewn it to be real and well-grounded, and to have all that is requisite to a good distinction. And, for the further confirmation of it, I have also shewn that human reason is not the measure of truth. From which great principle (which I was the more willing to discourse at large and thoroughly to settle and establish, because of its moment and consequence to the concern in hand), I have deduced that weighty inference, that therefore the incomprehensibility of a thing is no concluding argument of its not being true, which consequence, for the greater security of it, because it is so considerable in the present controversy, I have also proved backwards, by shewing that, if the incomprehensibility of a thing were an argument of its not being true, then human reason (contrary to what was before demonstrated), would be the measure of truth. Whence I infer again *ex absurdo*, that therefore the incomprehensibility of a thing is no argument of its not being true. From this last consequence I infer another of no less moment and consideration, viz. that therefore the incomprehensibility of a thing is no argument against the belief of it neither, where also I consider that seemingly-opposite maxim of Des Cartes [*Cartes's*], that we are to assent to nothing but what is clear and evident, and reconcile it to the other position. Whence my next step was to state the true use of reason in believing, which I shewed to consist not in examining the credibility of the object, but in taking account of the certainty of the revelation; which, when once resolved of, we are no longer to dispute, but believe. In fine, I have made an application of these considerations to the mysteries of the Christian faith, by shewing that they are never the less to be believed for being mysteries, supposing them otherwise sufficiently revealed, against which also I have shewn their incomprehensibility to be no objection. So that every way the great argument against the mysteries of the Christian faith, taken from the incomprehensibility

of them, vanishes and sinks into nothing. In all which I think I have effectually overthrown the general and fundamental ground of Socinianism, and truly in great measure that of Deism too, whose best argument against revealed religion in general is, because the Christian, upon all accounts the most preferable of those that pretend to be revealed, contains so many things in it which transcend the comprehension of human understanding. But whether this best argument be really a good one or *no* [not], the whole procedure of this discourse may sufficiently shew; and whoever *knows* [know] how to distinguish sophistry from good reasoning may easily judge.

2. And, now, you, gentlemen, for whose sakes I have been at the pains to write this treatise, give me leave, in a few words, to address myself a little more particularly to you, and to expostulate with you. Whether it be the good opinion you have of your cause, or the present opportunity you have to appear in the behalf of it, that invites you so freely to come abroad as you have done of late [*An.* 1697], you have certainly (to give your courage its due), taken a very rational and polite age for it, and I hope the wise conduct of Providence may turn this juncture to the advantage of the truth, and that the light to which you have adventured to expose your novel opinions may serve to make you see their absurdities, if you do not too obstinately shut your eyes against it. Some of you are considerable masters of reason (otherwise truly I should not think it worth while to argue with you); and you all profess great devotion to it (I wish you do not make it an idol), and to be very zealous and affectionate disciples of it. Reason is the great measure by which you pretend to go, and the judge to whom in all things you appeal. Now I accept of your measure, and do not refuse to be tried in the court of your own chusing. Accordingly, you see, I have dealt with you all along upon the ground of logic, and in a rational way, being very confident that reason alone will discover to you your undue elevations of it, and the errors you have been misled into



into by that occasion ; if you do but consult even this oracle of yours as you ought, and make a right use of its sacred light.

3. But I am afraid you do not. Instead of employing your reason, in the first place, to examine the certainty of the revelation, whether such a thing be truly revealed, and if so, to believe it, notwithstanding its being incomprehensible ; your method is to begin with the quality of the object, to consider whether it be incomprehensible or *no* [*not*], and, accordingly, to proceed in your belief or disbelief of its being revealed. It is true, indeed, you are not so gross as to argue thus ; this is comprehensible, therefore it is revealed. But you cannot deny but that you argue thus ; this is incomprehensible, therefore it is not revealed ; proceeding upon this general principle, that, though whatever *is* [*be*] comprehensible *is* [*be*] not therefore presently revealed, yet whatever *is* [*be*] revealed must be comprehensible. But, now, judge you whether this be not to make your reason the rule and measure of divine revelation, that is, that God can reveal nothing to you but what you can comprehend, or, that you are able to comprehend all that God can possibly reveal (for, otherwise, how is your not being able to comprehend any thing, an argument of its not being revealed) : I say, consider whether this be not to set up your reason as the rule of revelation ; and consider again whether this *does* [*do*] not resolve either into a very low opinion you have of God and his infinite perfections, or an extravagantly-high one you have of yourselves and your own rational endowments.

4. And yet, as if this were not presumption enough, do you not also make your reason the rule of faith, as well as of revelation ? To be the rule of faith is a very great thing, and yet, so far it is plain that you make your reason the rule of faith, that you will allow nothing to be believed but whose bottom you can sound by that line ; this being an avowed principle with you that you are to believe nothing but what you can comprehend. But hold a little ; before your reason can be the measure of faith,

must it not be the measure of truth? And I pray consider seriously, and tell me truly, do you verily think in your consciences that your reason is the measure of truth? Do you think your rational faculties proportioned to every intelligible object, and that you are able to comprehend all the things that are, and that there is nothing in the whole extent of science too high, too difficult or too abstruse for you; no one part of this vast intellectual sea but what you can wade through? If you say *yes*, besides the blasphemous presumption and luciferian arrogance of the assertion; and how little it falls on this side of *similis ero altissimo*, which banished the vain-glorious angel from the court of Heaven, because nothing less would content his aspiring ambition than to be as God there (though, by the way, there is more sense and congruity of reason in pretending to be a God in Heaven, than to be a God upon earth): I say, besides this, I would put it to your more sober thought to consider whether it be not every whit as great an extremity in the way of rational speculation to dogmatize so far as to pretend to comprehend every thing, as to say with the Sceptics and Pyrrhonians that we know nothing; the latter of which, however, in regard of its moral consequences, may be more innocently and safely affirmed than the former, since in that we only humbly degrade ourselves, and are content to sink down into the level of brutes, whereas in this we aspire to what is infinitely above us, and advance ourselves into the seat of God. And you know an excess of self-dejection is, of the two, the more tolerable extreme. But, if you say that your reason is not the measure of truth (as upon this, and the other considerations there lies a necessity upon you to confess), how then, I pray, comes it to be the measure of your faith, and how come you to lay down this for a maxim that you will believe nothing but what you can comprehend? Why, if your reason be not the measure of truth (and you yourselves care not, and I believe are ashamed in terms to say that it is), then do you not evidently discern that there is no consequence from the incomprehensibility of a thing to the incredibility of it, and that  
you

you have no reason to deny your belief to a thing as true, merely upon the account of its incomprehensibility. And do you not then plainly see that your great maxim falls to the ground, that you are to believe nothing but what you can comprehend? But, if, yet, notwithstanding this, you will still adhere to your beloved maxim, and resolve to believe nothing but what you can adjust and clear up to your reason, then, I pray, consider whether this will not necessarily lead you back to that absurd and withal odious and invidious principle, and which therefore you yourselves care not to own, viz. “that your  
“ reason is the measure of truth.”

5. But why do you not care to own it? Do you not see, at the first cast of your *eye* [*eyes*], that you are unavoidably driven upon it by your professed maxim? Or, if you do not think fit to own it (as indeed it is a good handsome morsel to swallow), why do you not then renounce that maxim of yours, which is the immediate consequence of it and necessarily resolves into it? Why will you, whose pretensions are so high to reason, act so directly against the laws of it, as to own that, implicitly and by consequence, which neither your *head* [*heads*] nor your *heart* [*hearts*] will serve you to acknowledge in broad and express terms? Be a little more consistent with your own sentiments at least, if not with truth; and be not yourselves a mystery, while you pretend not to believe any. If you do not care to own the principle, then deny the consequence; or, if you will not let go the consequence, then stand by and own the principle. Either speak out boldly and roundly that your reason is the measure of truth, or, if you think that too gross a defiance to sense, experience, religion and reason too, to be professedly maintained, then be so ingenuous to us, and so consistent with yourselves, as to renounce your maxim of believing nothing but what you can comprehend; since you cannot hold it but with that absurd principle, and which is therefore a certain argument that you ought not to hold it.



6. And are you sure that you always do, I mean so as to act by it; that you hold it *in hypothesis* as well as *in thesis*? Do you never assent to any thing but what you can comprehend? Are there not many things in the sciences which you find a pressing necessity to subscribe to, though at the same time you cannot conceive their *modus*, or account for their possibility? But you will say, perhaps, these are things of a physical and philosophical consideration, and such as have no relation to religion. True, they are so; but, then, besides that this visibly betrays the weakness of your ground (since if the incomprehensibility of a thing were a good argument against assenting to the truth of it, it would be so throughout, in the things of nature, as well as in the things of religion); I would here further demand of you why you are so particularly shy of admitting incomprehensible things in religion, why is it there only that you seem so stiffly and zealously to adhere to your maxim of believing nothing but what you can comprehend? Since there are so many inconceivable things, or, if you please, mysteries, in the works of nature and of providence; why not in religion? Nay, where should one expect to find mysteries, if not there, where all the things that are revealed are revealed by God himself, and many of them concerning himself, and his own infinite perfections? And what deference do we pay to God more than man, if either we suppose that he cannot reveal truths to us which we cannot comprehend, or if we will not believe them if he *does* [*do*]? Nay, may it not be rather said that we do not pay him so much? Since we think it advisable to receive many things from our tutors and masters upon their authority only, though we do not comprehend them ourselves; and justify our doing so by that well-known, and in many cases very reasonable maxim, *discentem oportet credere*. But as there is no authority like the divine, so if that motto become any school, it is that of Christ.

7. Now it is in this school that you profess to be scholars, and why then will you be such opiniative and uncompliant

compliant disciples as to refuse to receive the sublime lectures read to you by your divine and infallible master, merely because they are too high for you, and you cannot conceive them? When, at the same time, any one of you that is not a mathematician (pardon the supposition), would, I doubt not, take it upon the word of him that is so, that "the diameter of a square is incommensurable to the side," though he did not know how to demonstrate, or so much as conceive it himself. Since, then, you would express such implicit regard to the authority of a fallible, though learned man, shall not the divine *[authority]* weigh infinitely heavier with you; and, since you would not stick to assent to things above your conception in human and natural sciences, why are you so violently set against mysteries in religion, whereof God is, not only the author, but, in great measure the object too?

8. You know very well, that, in the great problem of the divisibility of quantity, there are incomprehensibilities on both sides, it being inconceivable that quantity should, and it being also inconceivable that it should not be divided infinitely. And yet you know again that, as being parts of a contradiction, one of them must necessarily be true. Possibly you may not be able with the utmost certainty and without all hesitation to determine which that is; but, however, you know, in the general, that one of them, indeterminately, must be true (which by the way is enough to convince you that the incomprehensibility of a thing is no argument against the truth of it), and you must also further grant that God, whose understanding is infinite, does precisely and determinately know which of them is so. Now, suppose God should reveal this, and make it an article of faith. It is not, indeed, likely that he will; it being so much beneath the majesty, and besides the end and intention of revelation, whose great design is the direction of our life and manners, and not the improvement of our speculation. But, suppose, I say, he should; would you not believe it? If not, then you must suppose either that  
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there is no necessity that either of the two parts (which yet are contradictory) should be true, or that, though one of them be true, yet that God does not know which is so, or that, though he *does* [*do*] know which is so, yet he does not deal faithfully in revealing that which is the right; all which are extravagant suppositions, and such as men of your sense and reason can never allow. But, then, if you say (as you must), that you would believe it; then, I pray, what becomes of your maxim of believing nothing but what you can comprehend, and why do you so stiffly plead the incomprehensibility of an article of faith against the belief of it, and why must there be no mysteries in religion? I say in religion, where, if anywhere, our reason might expect to find things above its measure, unreachable heights and unfathomable depths, and where God is not only the revealer (as in the case now supposed), but also the object revealed. For, is it not reasonable to suppose that there are things more incomprehensible in God than in nature; and, if you would receive an incomprehensible revelation of his concerning his works, how much rather ought you to admit the same concerning himself?

9. And this gives me occasion to say something to you concerning the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. This great article of the Christian faith you have a particular prejudice against and will not believe, and that because it so utterly transcends the force of reason to conceive how the same undivided and numerically-one simple essence of God should be communicated to three really-distinct persons, so as that there should be both a Unity in Trinity, and a Trinity in Unity. This, however, as inconceivable as it seems, some will not yield to be so far above reason but that a rational and intelligible account may be given of it, which, accordingly, they have essayed to do by several hypotheses. But I decline at present all advantage that may be had from them, or any other that may be invented to render this an intelligible article. You know I reason all along upon the contrary supposition, that those articles of the Christian faith which we  
call



call mysteries are really incomprehensible, and only go to invalidate the consequence that is drawn *from* [d] thence in prejudice of their belief. Well, then, for once, we will give you what you stand for, that the doctrine of the Trinity is indeed utterly above reason. You have our leave to suppose it as incomprehensible as you please. But, then, you are to consider (besides what has hitherto been discoursed concerning the nullity of the consequence from the incomprehensibility of a thing to its incredibility) that this is a revelation of *God* [God's] concerning himself, and do you pretend to comprehend the nature and essence of God? If you do, then your understanding is as infinite as the divine. But, if you do not, then the incomprehensibility of this mysterious article ought to be no objection with you against the belief of it; since, if it be, you must be driven to say that you comprehend the nature of God, which I hope you have too much religion as well as reason to affirm.

10. And, indeed, if we meet with so many insuperable difficulties in the search of nature, much more may we in the contemplation of its author; if the works of God do so puzzle and baffle our understandings, much more may they confess their deficiency when God himself is their object; and, if we *are* [be] not able to explain creation, or give an account how the material world issued in time from the great fountain of being, much less may we be supposed able to explain the eternal and ineffable generation of his divine and consubstantial word. But, what, then? Shall we not believe it? Or, rather, shall we not say, upon this occasion, with the pious and ingenious Mr. Wesley \*,

“ Ineffable the way, for who  
 “ Th’ Almighty to perfection ever knew?  
 “ But he himself has said it, and it must be true.”

\* Life of Christ, p. 184.

Nay, to go lower yet; if there be so many things relating to extension, motion, and figure (of all which we have clear ideas), which we cannot comprehend, and there result from them propositions which we know not what to make of; with how much greater reason may we expect to find what we cannot understand in the nature of an infinite being, whereof we have no adequate idea. And, indeed, we meet with so many incomprehensibles in the school of nature, that one would think we should be too much familiarized to them to think them strange in that of religion, and God seems on purpose to exercise and discipline our understandings with what is above them in natural things, that so we might be the less surprized to find what passes our conception in his own infinite essence. Here then at least you may confess your ignorance, and that, without any reproach to your understandings; which were indeed intended for the contemplation, but not for the comprehension of an infinite object. You need not therefore here be backward to own that you meet with what you cannot comprehend (it would indeed be a mystery if you should not), nor think it any disgrace to have your eyes dazzled with that light, at the insupportable glory of which even the Seraphin veil and cover theirs.

11. You may perceive, by this, that your denial of the doctrine of the Trinity, because of the incomprehensibility of it, proceeds upon no good consequence; but you are also further desired to consider the very bad one that it naturally leads to. You refuse to receive this article, because you cannot comprehend it; but, besides that, your reason for this your refusal is not good unless you could be supposed to comprehend every thing, even the deep things of God. Pray, consider what the consequence will be if you pursue your principle to the utmost, and conduct yourselves entirely by its measures. Will it not inevitably lead you to the denial of all religion? This, perhaps, may startle you; but think again. Will not this necessarily lead you to the  
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the denial of God, the foundation of all religion? For, if you will not believe the trinal distinction of persons in the divine essence, because you cannot conceive how such a thing can be; then, may you not, for the same reason, refuse as well to believe the divine essence itself, some of whose incommunicable attributes, such as his self-existence, eternity, immensity, &c. are as incomprehensible as any thing in the notion of the Trinity can be? So that if you will but follow your measure from the denial of three, you may be quickly brought to deny even one. So directly does your principle, of believing nothing but what you can comprehend, lead to Atheism; and that, with such swift and wide strides, that, were it not for the assistance of the same expedient, your friends the Deists would hardly be able to follow you.

12. And now, sirs, what do you think of your principle? Is it not a goodly one, and richly worth all the passion and zeal you have expressed for it? You know very well that M. Abbadie, in his excellent treatise of the Divinity of Christ, has shewn you that upon one of your grounds (viz. the denial of that article) the Mahumetan religion is preferable to the Christian; and, indeed, that you are obliged by it to renounce Christianity and turn Mahumetans. This, truly, was a home-thrust. But yet you see the consequence of your general principle reaches further, as leading you not only out of Christianity, but out of all religion, whether natural or revealed, even beyond Deism, even into Atheism itself. If it *does* [*do*] not actually lead you thither, the fault is not in the principle, whose connexion with that consequence is natural enough; but it is because you are not so consistent with yourselves as to follow it. And, indeed, it is a great happiness that you do not (since, if you were here better logicians, you would be worse men), though it would be a much greater, if, for the danger of being more consistent with it, you would be persuaded to lay it down.

13. And



13. And, that you may be so, be pleased further to consider, that, though this principle of yours *does* [*do*] not eventually carry you as far as Atheism, because perhaps the horridness of the conclusion may be a counterweight against the force of the premises (though you see it naturally tends that way); yet there is very great danger of its leading you effectually into Deism, that not being accounted now-a-days such a very frightful thing. For, as long as you hold that what is above human reason is not to be believed, and upon that account reject the Christian mysteries because they are above reason, you lie at the mercy of that argument that shall prove to you that these mysteries are indeed revealed, and that the genuine and natural sense of the sacred text declares for them. For, if you once come to be convinced of that, you will then be obliged, in consequence of your principle, to renounce that religion which reveals such incredible things, that is the Christian; which will be a shrewd (indeed an invincible) temptation to you to throw up all revealed religion, and so to turn perfect Deists. And I pray God it may not have that effect upon you!

14. But, as to the parting with Christianity; that you will be further tempted to do, upon another account. For, when you have by your principle stript it, or, I may say, rather unbowelled it of its great and adorable mysteries, it will appear such a poor, lank, slender thing to you, that you will hardly think it considerable enough to be revealed as a new and more perfect institution by God, or to be received as such by thinking and considering men. For, what will such find so considerable in Christianity (especially as a new institution), what so visibly peculiar and assuredly distinguishing, what that may infallibly set it above an human institution, if it be once robbed of its mysteries? They may, indeed, think it a good plain piece of morals, and such as exceeds any other of a known human composition; but how are they sure but that the  
invention

invention of man may be able to rise so high, as to compose such a system as this, if you set aside its Mysteries? Which therefore I cannot but look upon, of all the things that are intrinsic to it (for I do not here consider Miracles), as the greatest characters of its Divinity. And some perhaps would be apt to think them such, as without which it would hardly be thought worthy of reception (especially as a new institution), even with the help of Miracles, which men are always ready, and not without reason, to suspect, when the matters, for whose sake they are wrought, bear not sufficient proportion to them. Which they would also, perhaps, be inclined to think to be the present case. For what (would they say) is there in the Christian Religion that deserves so great ado, what that should engage an Omnipotent arm to introduce it into the world by such mighty signs and wonders, if there be indeed nothing wonderful in it, that is, if you take away its Mysteries? What? Cannot a good system of Morality (especially if only a second, and a little more correct edition of a former) be communicated to the world, without alarming heaven and earth, and giving disturbance to the course of nature? And, if Christianity be no more, what proportion (say they) will it bear to its miraculous introduction? And what will it be found to have so very considerable, as either to deserve or justify such an apparatus? It must indeed be allow'd by all to be a good wholesome institution for the direction of manners, but what is there so very great and admirable in it, what that either deserves or answers to so many types and figures and prophetic predictions, what that so copiously sets forth the manifold wisdom of God and the glory of his attributes and the nothingness of the creature? And where are those deep things of God, that eye hath not seen *nor* [or] ear heard, nor have enter'd into the heart of man? 1 Cor. 2. 9, 10. (a place which the apostle applies out of the prophet Isaiah to the revelations of the Gospel) Where, I say, are those profound things, which the Spirit of God only, that

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searches all things, could reveal, and which, even now they are reveal'd, the angels desire to look into? 1 Pet. 1. 12. You'll hardly find any thing of so rais'd a character in Christianity, if you divest it of its Mysteries; which therefore may justly be reckon'd as the main pillars of it, without which it will have much ado to support itself. So that, in short, Christianity not Mysteries (how fond soever a certain author *is* [*be*] of such a Religion) will make but a very little figure in proportion to its pomp and external splendor, and indeed will almost dwindle down into nothing.

15. It may, indeed, even without the Mysteries, make a shift to subsist as a mere system of precepts, and rule of life; though, even thus consider'd, it will be greatly impair'd and suffer much disadvantage (as wanting those convincing demonstrations of God's hatred of Sin, and of his love towards mankind, and withal those endearing and persuasive arguments for their returns of love, gratitude and obedience towards him, which can only be deriv'd from the redemption of the world by the death and satisfaction of its divine undertaker); but, as a covenant of grace establish'd betwixt God and his offending and estranged creature, it cannot possibly stand, but must fall to the ground. So that, though the moral or legal part (as I may call it) of Christianity may, at a hard rate, continue after the downfall of its Mysteries, yet its federal part, and all that is properly Gospel in it, must needs be involv'd in the ruin, and fall with them; that being all built upon the satisfaction of Christ, as that again upon his divinity, which is therefore the very foundation of the Christian religion, as M. Abbadie has by variety of demonstration proved it to be. If then you would have that Divine Institution stand, and if you would stand fast in it (both which I am willing to suppose), have a care how you remove its Mysteries; considering how fundamental they are to the building, and how great a share of its sacred weight rests upon them. But endeavour rather to remove your own prejudices,



judices, to mortify your understandings, to study humility, and to restrain the too-free sallies of your too-curious and over-venturous reason by still and silent reflections upon God's infinite greatness, and your own almost-as-great infirmities; by which one thought, well-pursued, you will (by the grace of God) come to a better understanding of yourselves than to reject any of his plain revelations merely because you cannot conceive them, and so, leaving light and vision to the other life, will be content, with other good christians, humbly to believe and adore in this.

16. Gentlemen, I beseech you seriously to consider what, with Christian charity and all due civil respect, I have here laid before you; and, if, upon consideration of it, you find any weight in it, to let it have its full force and effect upon you. Which if you do, I hope it may serve, by the blessing of God (to whom for that end I humbly devote this labour), to convince you, or, at least, to put you upon such better considerations of your own as may! For, I pretend not here to have said all, but to have left many things to the enlargement and improvement of your own meditation, considering the impropriety of doing otherwise to persons of your parts and learning; which I pray God to sanctify and increase to you! Whereby you may perceive that I am not against your making use of your reason. No, I would only have you reason rightly; and, that you may do so, would have you by all human methods to improve and cultivate your reason as much as you can: being well persuaded that, as a half-view of things makes men opiniative, disputatious and dogmatical, so a clear and thorough light makes them humble and distrustful of themselves; and that, the more cultivated and improved any man's natural reason is, the easier it will be for him to captivate it to the obedience of faith.

F I N I S.

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LETTER



L E T T E R

FROM THE

E D I T O R

TO THE REVEREND

D R. P R I E S T L E Y.

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DEAR SIR,

ALLOW me to beg you will peruse this little book; not only for the sake of my new grammar and dictionary of the English language, but for your own sake.



It was written by a man of a strong and elegant mind, and a meek and amiable \*temper, against Toland and the Socinians of the last age; and for the purpose of vindicating Des Cartes from a charge of Socinianism. In answer to some of the Socinian arguments, this valuable book, I venture to say, will have weight with you: especially as it may never, perhaps, have fallen in your way; since it is now scarce, and the 13th edition, which I fancy is the last, was printed 50 years ago.

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\* Norris does not use the weapons of South. "The Socinians are impious blasphemers, whose infamous pedigree runs back (from wretch to wretch) in a direct line to the devil himself; and who are fitter to be crushed by the civil magistrate, as destructive to government and society, than to be confuted as merely heretics in religion." Jortin calls this (Tillotson's Works, folio, 1752, vol. I. p. cxxiv.) "the true *agonistic* style:" with a strong adjective, which is used in poor Floyer Sydenham's translation of Plato, though not in Johnson's dictionary. Johnson gives us four of this family; three without any authority, and one upon the authority of Milton: but Milton did not mean, perhaps, to write English, when, in christening his great dramatic poem, he used two substantives, unaccompanied by an article or an adjective.

What

What Norris says, after his favourite Des Cartes † and Mallebranche, I have still suffered him to say; supposing that there cannot now be two opinions about the intelligible world, &c. This small part of his book will not affect the strength of his arguments in other parts; and in all parts, in every page, I am sure you will admire his manner and his style, and, in general, the singular correctness of his language.

The frankness, with which I beg you to peruse this book for your own sake, will not, Sir, I am confident, give you offence; after the uncommon candour with which you counselled me about my dictionary, in the year 1786. “ I send you my  
 “ ———, which I shall beg your acceptance of,  
 “ if you think proper to make any use of it; but  
 “ I really would not advise you to do it, or indeed  
 “ any of my theological works, except it were  
 “ my Institutes of natural and reveal'd Religion,  
 “ and Letters to a philosophical Unbeliever, which  
 “ are works that few christians will object to.

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† Pourquoi encore vouloir mettre à la place de reveries de Lucrece les reveries de Des Cartes ?

OEuvres de Voltaire, x. 304.

“ But

“ But my honest advice to you is to use nothing  
“ of mine, except my philosophical or philological  
“ pieces, or the Lectures on Criticism.”

This very honest advice I certainly shall not follow altogether. One reason why I now address you is to exhibit this proof of the liberality of your mind ; and to say that I think the advice too liberal, and that I will not be altogether guided by it. My object, Dr. Priestley, is not a party-book, even as to the most material tenets of that religion, which I profess to believe, to teach and to defend: my object is a dictionary of the English language, for men of all parties, in Europe, America, and perhaps Asia ; and, I trust, for our latest posterity.

My business is with the words, the language of writers ; not with their opinions : tho' I agree with you, that, as I am to preserve all the useful and valuable passages I can, so I am not to assist the enemies of mankind in their attempts to pilfer from their fellow creatures the petty joys of this world and the glorious promise of a better. Yet it seems not hence to follow, that the honest lexicographer ought to pride himself, according to your advice, in not  
quoting;



quoting some of Priestley's writings, or, according to the practice of which Johnson boasted, in quoting none of Samuel Clarke's. That would not be a very sufficient dictionary of the French language, which should not enable us to read Voltaire.

However, from the most poisonous books you will, I am sure, allow me to extract every thing I can of a medicinal kind.

Shall I not try to serve the world, and particularly to encourage those who do not yet meet with any of that countenance which their undertakings appear to deserve, by quoting David Hume? —“ I “ was ever more disposed to see the favourable “ than unfavourable side of things; a turn of “ mind which it is more happy to possess, than to “ be born to an estate of ten thousand a year.”

My own Life. Hume's History of England.

8vo. 1782. vol. I. page x, xi.

This single assertion, at the end of a long and experienced life, may do almost as much service to the world, as all Hume's essays.

Shall

Shall I not quote even the essays themselves, tho' not in their pestilent passages? Shall not my dictionary talk thus to posterity, in the words of Hume? "I would rather, for my own happiness and self-enjoyment, have a friendly, humane heart, than possess all the other virtues of Demosthenes and Philip united."

Hume's Essays, 8vo 1767. vol. ii. p. 385.

In many respects is it not my duty to quote a writer, whom my contemporaries agree to consider as a classic? It is my duty to show that Hume seems to have preferred the word *self-murder*, to *suicide* (at least before he undertook to defend the cowardly crime), ii. 339. and that, notwithstanding his acquaintance with French, Hume preferred an English substantive of his own (I suppose), which is at least as good as what we hear and see every day borrowed from our neighbours.—"There is a manner, a grace, a genteelness, an I-know-not-what, \* which some men possess above others."

Essays, ii. 339.

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\* Boyer's very insufficient dictionary (4to. 1764) gives *Je-ne-sai-quoi* as a noun substantive; and Prior uses it in *Paulo Purganti*.

But,

But, whatever I may think myself bound to do in my new dictionary, the advice given to the author by Dr. Priestley the dissenter \*, the Socinian, should not lie concealed in a private letter : it should be known and heard and praised, amidst all the unavoidable violence and din of combat.

Your antagonists, and my friends, the Bishop of St. David's and the Dean of Canterbury, will not, I am sure, refuse their praise, on this score, to my friend Dr. Priestley.

Allow me, Sir, the honour of calling Dr. Priestley, the grammarian, the philologist and the natural philosopher, my friend : for I shall not soon forget what I owe you, on account of the papers, conversations and correspondence with which you have favoured me about my dictionary (may it in some degree

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\* How far this note may appear connected with what I am writing I feel little anxious to know : yet something like an opportunity offers itself, while I am thanking one dissenter, to express my uncommon obligations to another ; and to say that, though I certainly wish all dissenters were in the bosom of the Church (but upon our terms, not theirs), I wish still more, if possible, that every orthodox Christian had the "good-will towards men" of Mr. Joseph Holden.



answer your expectations!); and I shall always remain (ἀλλὰ μέχρι θανάτου \*), Dear Sir,

Your much obliged humble servant,

HERBERT CROFT.

Oxford, November, 1789.

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\* Quum amicus eum [Periclem Atheniensem] rogaret, ut pro re causâque ejus falsum dejeraret; his ad eum verbis usus est, Δεῖ με συμπράττειν τοῖς φίλοις, ἀλλὰ μέχρι θανάτου.

Auli Gellii Noctes Att. Lib. i. c. 3.

Plutarch, and Erasmus by *usque ad aras*, seem to have changed θανάτου here, with some of the MSS. into βωμῶν.

T H E E N D.



